MARVEL MASTERWORKS

THE MIGHTY THOR

VOLUME 24

THE MIGHTY THOR Nos. 349-359
ANNUAL No. 13 & MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVEL No. 15
WALTER SIMONSON
WITH ALAN ZELENETZ & CHARLES VESS

MARVEL
the mighty
THOR
THE BROTHERHOOD OF ODIN

MARVEL
the mighty
THOR

MARVEL
the mighty
THOR

MARVEL
the mighty
THOR
THE FINALE OF THE
SURTUR SAGA!

MARVEL
the mighty
THOR
STAND ASIDE, THOR! FACE YOUR DEATH...
AND ODIN'S SON IS MINE!

MARVEL
DOUBLE-SIZED ANNUAL
the mighty
THOR

MARVEL
the mighty
THOR
...AND BETA RAY BILL, TOO!

MARVEL
the mighty
THOR

MARVEL
the mighty
THOR
...IN THE SERVICE OF LOKI!

MARVEL

MARVEL MASTERWORKS

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VOLUME 24

COLLECTING

THE MIGHTY THOR Nos. 349-359

ANNUAL No. 13 & MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVEL No. 15

WALTER SIMONSON

WITH ALAN ZELENETZ & CHARLES VESS

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MARVEL MASTERWORKS
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2-18-84

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FAR BEYOND THE FIELDS WE KNOW... ANOTHER ROUND...

BY WALTER SIMONSON

This is the second *Masterworks* volume of my run on *Thor* as writer/artist, and contains the conclusion of my original long-form story that began with my first issue. You could call it, "The Surtur Saga." The following stories continue the story of Thor and his comrades in the aftermath of the saga's ending. The fates of Odin and Surtur had repercussions that lasted throughout my run on the book, as they should have. I don't want to give anything away for those who may not have read these stories before, so I shall be somewhat indirect in my references to them. My intent, after finishing "The Surtur Saga," was to tell small stories for a bit before ramping up to a larger-scale epic again. So the stories were a lot shorter than "The Surtur Saga," in some cases, only a single issue.

One of those single issues shortly after the saga's conclusion was *The Mighty Thor* #355. Essentially, it was the issue in which Thor comes to terms with his father's fate. He does so when he encounters an ancient being from earlier days whose hospitality, kindness and wisdom helped Thor grapple with his own sorrow. And the story's setting in the wild mountains of the north, far from any sort of habitation, seemed an appropriate place for grief and anger to manifest. I feel that that issue is some of my best writing in my run, and it was the first issue I wrote that I did not draw.

I was pretty exhausted after finishing "The Surtur Saga," and needed a break. So I wrote an issue for another artist to draw (#355), followed by a fill-in issue written by Bob Harras and drawn by Bob Layton (#356). I no longer remember exactly how we came to ask Sal Buscema to draw #355's "The Icy Hearts." I'd like to think I was smart enough to have done it, but I can't be certain. What is certain is that Sal is an underrated comics storyteller. He has a gift for juxtaposing panels aesthetically, with clear transitions that carry the story from one panel to the next, and Sal could carry the story as quietly or dramatically as required. I was delighted he came on board for the issue. I was also tremendously flattered when it became clear that Sal had looked at the previous issues of *Thor* I had drawn and taken some influence from them.

As was common back then, we worked "Marvel-style." That is to say that I wrote a plot, gave it to Sal, he drew the plot in 22 pages, sent the pages back to me and I scripted the issue from his drawings. I have rarely had such an easy time scripting someone else's art. He hit all the beats I wanted, and although it was a rather static issue, I felt that it came off quite well. In fact, Sal did such lovely work on the job, I asked him to take over as the regular artist when I decided to give up the art reins some issues after the conclusion of this volume. And we had great fun working together. I think Sal enjoyed the partnership as well and had the same opinion of *Thor* #355 that I did as it is one of the few issues for which he kept the complete original art.

Balder was still pretty portly in these stories as he had been depicted at the beginning of my run. However, I had a long game in mind for him. I'd always loved Balder as a character, but his nature was to be a sort of second fiddle to Thor. Of course, it was Thor's comic so that was natural, but I wanted to give Balder a story of his own at some point, independent of Thor. Eventually, I did but you'll have stay tuned for the next volume of *Marvel Masterworks: The Mighty Thor* for that tale. When I did tell it in the *Balder the Brave* miniseries, Sal returned to the Thor mythos to draw those particular issues.

The idea of depicting Balder's weight gain was really suggested to me by a book I'd read a few

years before I began writing and drawing *Thor*. An author named Richard Monaco wrote a number of books based around the Arthurian legends. Several of his books were centered around a knight of the Round Table. In Monaco's first novel, *Parsival*, he depicts his protagonist has having gotten sloppily overweight in a post-Arthurian England. But when a crisis arises, we discover that weight notwithstanding, Parsival is still an agile, coordinated and extremely gifted fighter. And such became my view of Balder in my early stories.

During my run, I indulged myself to a degree with some of the things I did. The appearance of the Titanium Man, an old Iron Man foe, was really a tip of the hat to my early days as a reader of Marvel Comics in college in the mid-1960s. I loved Gene Colan's work on Iron Man and the Titanium Man, as Gene drew him in *Tales of Suspense*, was one of my favorite Marvel villains. So I combined my likes for the character as well as my old interest in pulp SF to create a story around him.

Also in those issues is a brief (five panel) appearance of a Mark Gruenwald-created character. This was early in the days of cross-continuity between comics becoming more tightly woven. Mark had decided to clean out some of the rather minor villains in the Marvel Universe by having them assassinated by a mysterious killer. So, I did my bit and Scourge killed a villain I don't think I'd ever heard of before called Megatak. And I guess he stayed dead because I never had to draw him again.

I was also able to write a little soap opera between Thor and Lorelei and Loki and the Enchantress. That was one of the things I liked about writing and drawing *Thor*. The story possibilities seemed endless, ranging from vast epics to small scale stories about the individual characters.

Something I didn't mention in my introduction to *Marvel Masterworks: The Mighty Thor Vol. 23* is a note about my design of Surtur. In the early days when Thor was published in *Journey Into Mystery*, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby created a backup feature titled, "Tales of Asgard." They were five pages long and, in the beginning, they were a fairly straightforward retelling of the Norse myths. They quickly branched off into stories of their own involving the youth of Thor and eventually chapters that told of various quests before eventually ending to allow for full issue-length Thor stories. But the very first "Tales of Asgard," published in *Journey into Mystery* #97, was a summary of the Viking view of the Nine Worlds of Norse mythology, its structure and its inhabitants. And on the third page of that story, in the bottom left panel, sits Surtur, hand on the pommel of his flaming sword as he waits for the end of the world when he will go out and destroy gods and men alike. The drawing of Surtur is powerful and one of his most distinctive features is his horns. They are black flat shapes that merge with the shadows around his eyes. When Jack drew Surtur in later Thor stories, he drew him with more conventional horns projecting out from his forehead; however, I loved the graphics of the first drawing and when I drew Surtur, those flat, black and dangerous horns were the ones I drew.

AT THE WORLD'S END SAT SURTUR, THE DEMON OF FIRE, WHO WAITED, WITH HIS FLAMING SWORD, FOR THE END OF THE WORLD, WHEN HE MIGHT GO FORTH TO DESTROY GODS AND MEN ALIKE!

This work was all done before there was any real concept of "Easter eggs" so I got to be ahead of the curve for once: There's a brief cameo appearance of a pair of characters I helped create for another universe long ago and far away, but I'll leave their discovery to the reader as an exercise. A hint is that Weezie and I also make an even briefer cameo in the same scene. I'm wearing a Star Slammers tee shirt, based on a graphic novel I wrote and drew of my own characters a couple of years earlier that was published by Marvel.

I also wanted to wrap up the life of Dr. Don Blake, Thor's original alter ego, whom I had written out of the comic in my early issues. This was more or less a housekeeping decision as I felt that Dr. Blake had outlived his purpose in the series some years earlier. Blake had had a medical practice in Chicago at that time, and it seemed odd to still have a doctor's office without a doctor. I've always been annoyed by dangling plot threads that were never resolved in ongoing stories. I didn't mind if it took a long time to resolve them, years even, but I wanted them wrapped up. So, I did a short inversion of the "Tales of Asgard." I called it "Tales of Midgard" and took three pages in the back of an issue to conclude Dr. Blake's story—at least for my run.

"Tales of Midgard" contains some of the really dateable fashions of my entire run. Fandral the Dashing is dashing around the tale in serious mid-'80s threads. The baggy clothes of this sort were all the rage when I wrote and drew this story. I think I was probably inspired by Bill Sienkiewicz, who was cutting edge whenever he came into the office. And I had a baggy, slightly quilted sweatshirt myself at the time that I loved. I think that fashion trend lasted about twenty minutes, just long enough for me to get it into print before it vanished forever. But I will say, those clothes were pretty comfortable.

Finally, I'd like to say a quick word about two of the stories in this volume that I had almost nothing to do with. I say almost because the first is *Thor Annual* #13. I drew the cover for it, but that was the extent of my participation. Alan Zelenetz wrote it; he had preceded me as a writer of *The Mighty Thor* comic. And with all due respect to Alan, what makes this *Annual* wonderfully special to me is that John Buscema, one of the finest draftsmen the comic industry has ever seen, not only penciled it but inked it as well. For all the wonderful inkers who have worked over John's pencils across the years, my opinion is that nobody inked him better than Big John himself. Not only that but the final page of the story is *the* classic shot of Mephisto seated on his stone throne. As far as I'm concerned, that's pretty much worth the price of this volume in and of itself. A spectacular drawing.

The second story appeared originally as one of Marvel's graphic novels, back in 1985, when I was in the middle of my run. Like the *Annual*, it was written by Alan, and like the *Annual*, it contained beautiful art, some of the earlier work of one Charles Vess. Charles got into the business a little after me and has since gone on to become one of the modern premier illustrators of fantasy anywhere. In the *Raven Banner* graphic novel, he brings that sense of otherworldly atmosphere he would go on to embrace so beautifully in later work.

So I hope, gentle readers, that you enjoy reading these stories as much as I've enjoyed revisiting them. Travel safely, and be well.

New York
2025

MARVEL
the mighty
THOR
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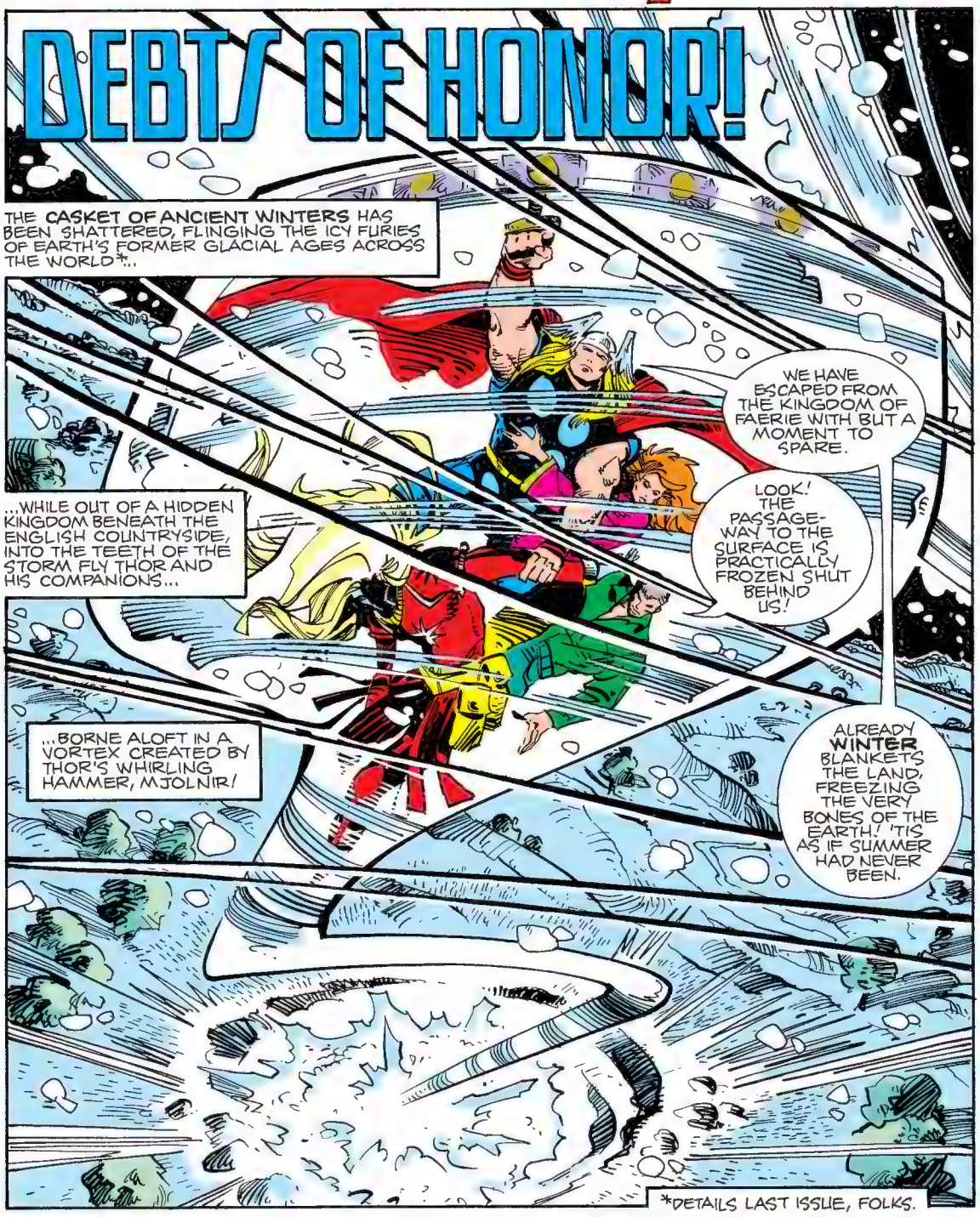
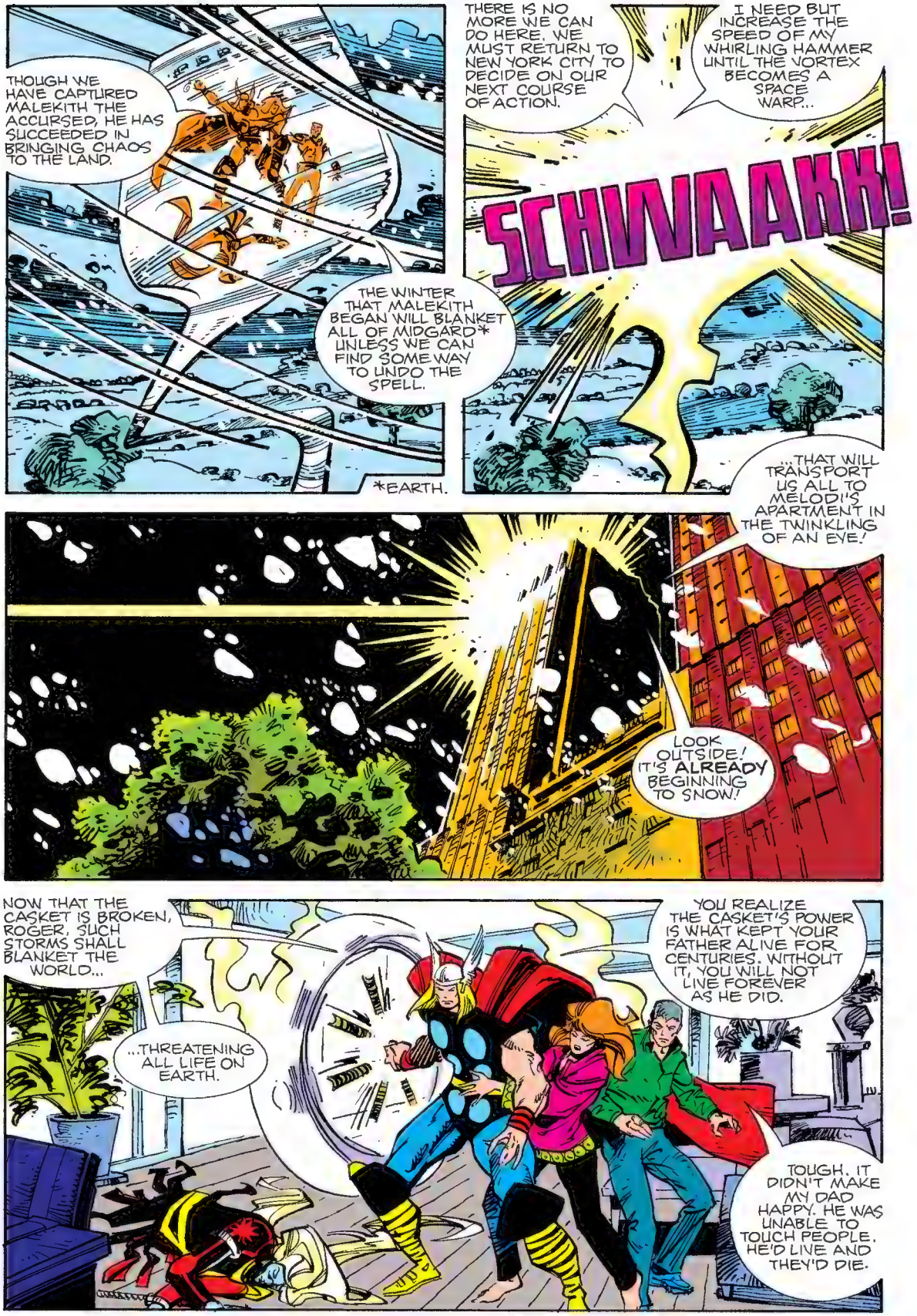
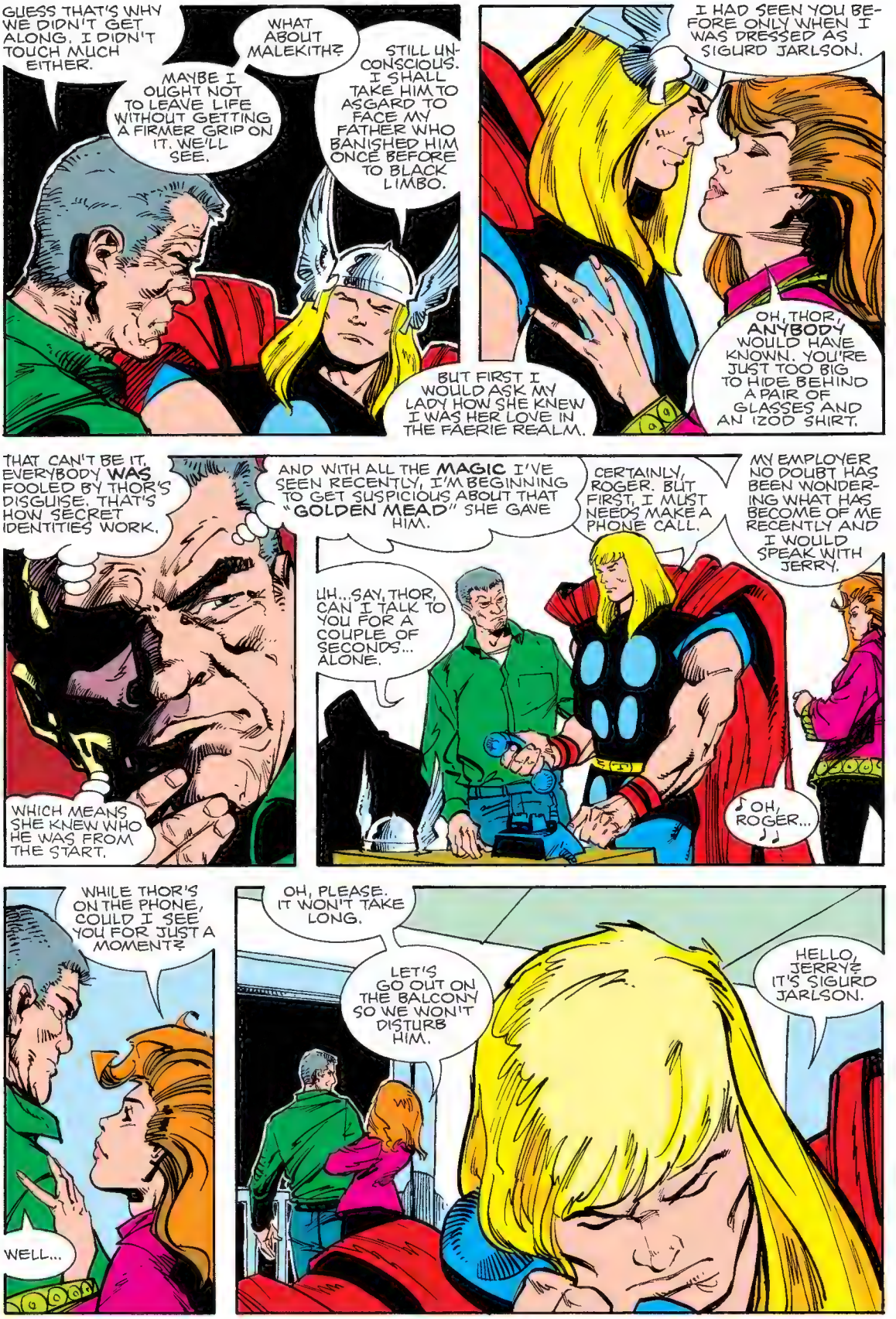
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
THE BROTHERS ODIN

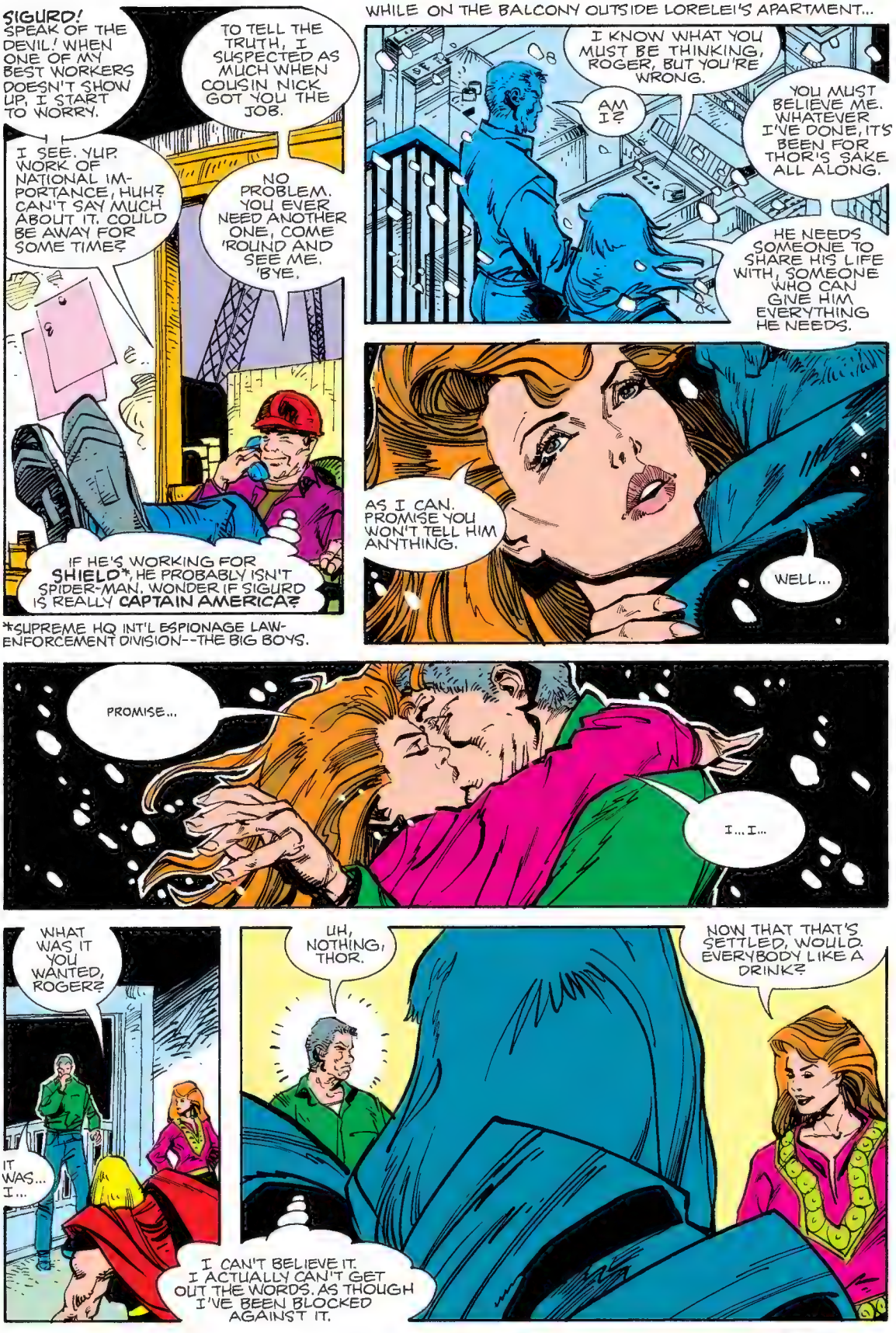
STAN LEE PRESENTS: the MIGHTY THOR®

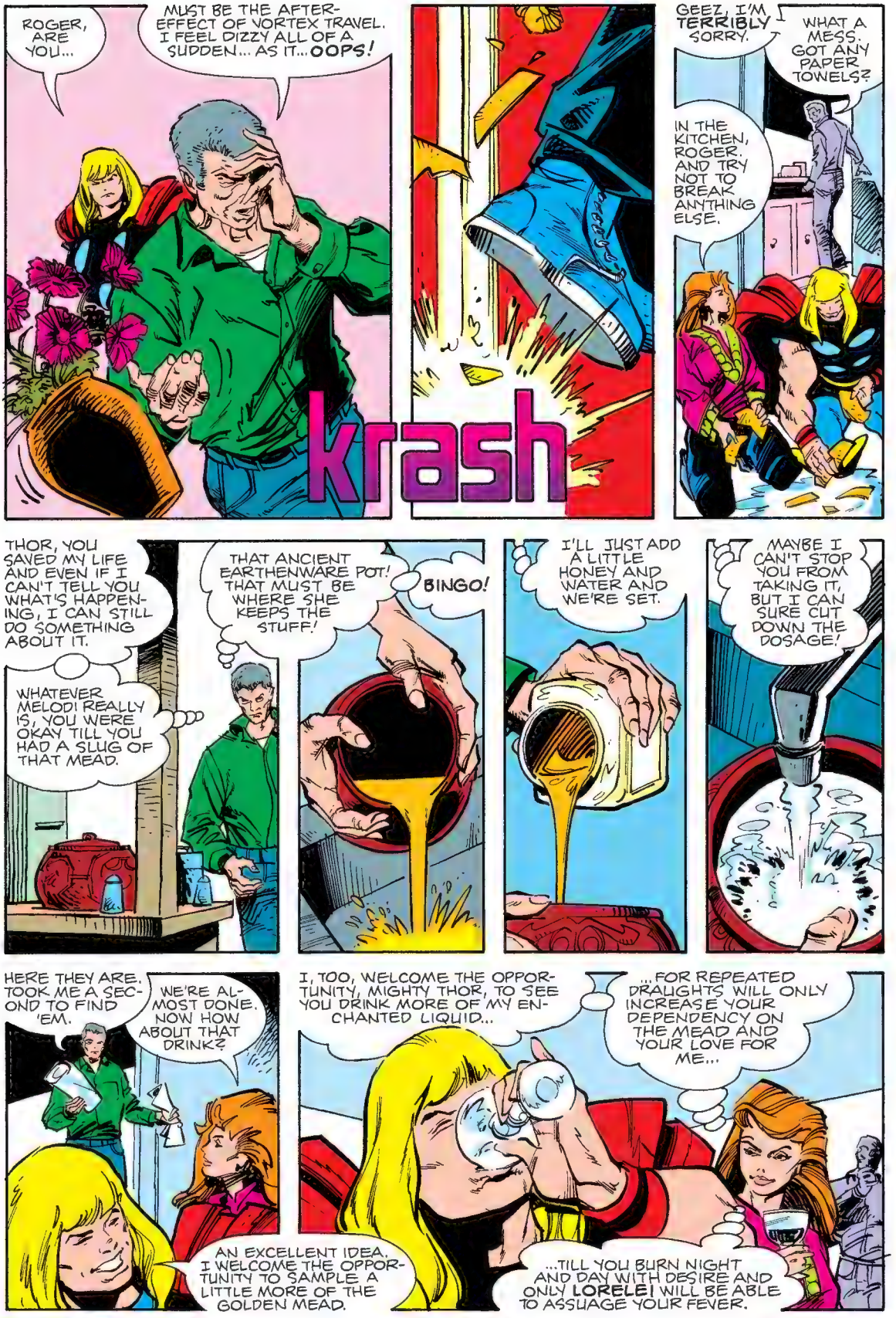

DEBTS OF HONOR!
THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS HAS BEEN SHATTERED, FLINGING THE ICY FURIES OF EARTH'S FORMER GLACIAL AGES ACROSS THE WORLD*...
...WHILE OUT OF A HIDDEN KINGDOM BENEATH THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE, INTO THE TEETH OF THE STORM FLY THOR AND HIS COMPANIONS...
...BORNE ALOFT IN A VORTEX CREATED BY THOR'S WHIRLING HAMMER, MJOLNIR!
WE HAVE ESCAPED FROM THE KINGDOM OF FAERIE WITH BUT A MOMENT TO SPARE.
LOOK! THE PASSAGE-WAY TO THE SURFACE IS PRACTICALLY FROZEN SHUT BEHIND US!
ALREADY WINTER BLANKETS THE LAND, FREEZING THE VERY BONES OF THE EARTH! 'TIS AS IF SUMMER HAD NEVER BEEN.
*DETAILS LAST ISSUE, FOLKS.

ART AND STORY: WALTER SIMONSON · LETTERING: JOHN WORKMAN, JR. · COLORS: CHRISTIE SCHEELE
EDITING: MARK GRUENWALD · EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: JIM SHOOTER

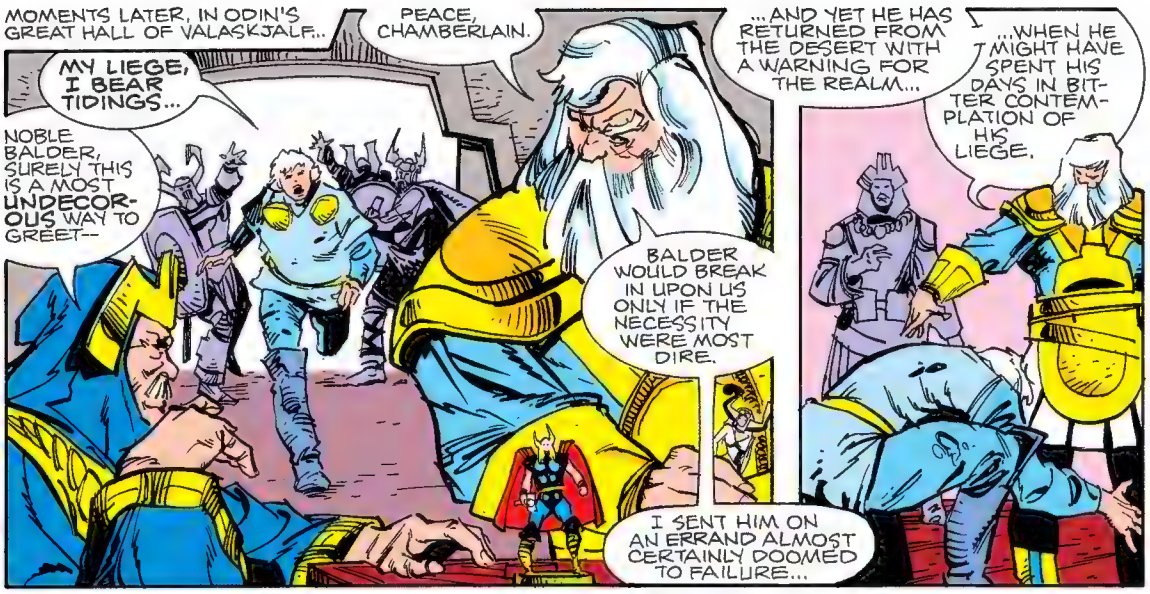

THOUGH WE HAVE CAPTURED MALEKITH THE ACCURSED, HE HAS SUCCEEDED IN BRINGING CHAOS TO THE LAND.
THE WINTER THAT MALEKITH BEGAN WILL BLANKET ALL OF MIDGARD* UNLESS WE CAN FIND SOME WAY TO UNDO THE SPELL.
*EARTH.
THERE IS NO MORE WE CAN DO HERE. WE MUST RETURN TO NEW YORK CITY TO DECIDE ON OUR NEXT COURSE OF ACTION.
I NEED BUT INCREASE THE SPEED OF MY WHIRLING HAMMER UNTIL THE VORTEX BECOMES A SPACE WARP...
SCHWAAKK!
...THAT WILL TRANSPORT US ALL TO MELODI'S APARTMENT IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE!
LOOK OUTSIDE! IT'S ALREADY BEGINNING TO SNOW!
NOW THAT THE CASKET IS BROKEN, ROGER, SUCH STORMS SHALL BLANKET THE WORLD...
...THREATENING ALL LIFE ON EARTH.
YOU REALIZE THE CASKET'S POWER IS WHAT KEPT YOUR FATHER ALIVE FOR CENTURIES. WITHOUT IT, YOU WILL NOT LIVE FOREVER AS HE DID.
TOUGH. IT DIDN'T MAKE MY DAD HAPPY. HE WAS UNABLE TO TOUCH PEOPLE. HE'D LIVE AND THEY'D DIE.


GUESS THAT'S WHY WE DIDN'T GET ALONG. I DIDN'T TOUCH MUCH EITHER.
WHAT ABOUT MALEKITH?
MAYBE I OUGHT NOT TO LEAVE LIFE WITHOUT GETTING A FIRMER GRIP ON IT. WE'LL SEE.
STILL UNCONSCIOUS. I SHALL TAKE HIM TO ASGARD TO FACE MY FATHER WHO BANISHED HIM ONCE BEFORE TO BLACK LIMBO.
I HAD SEEN YOU BEFORE ONLY WHEN I WAS DRESSED AS SIGURD JARLSON.
OH, THOR, ANYBODY WOULD HAVE KNOWN. YOU'RE JUST TOO BIG TO HIDE BEHIND A PAIR OF GLASSES AND AN IZOD SHIRT.
BUT FIRST I WOULD ASK MY LADY HOW SHE KNEW I WAS HER LOVE IN THE FAERIE REALM.
THAT CAN'T BE IT. EVERYBODY WAS FOOLED BY THOR'S DISGUISE. THAT'S HOW SECRET IDENTITIES WORK.
WHICH MEANS SHE KNEW WHO HE WAS FROM THE START.
AND WITH ALL THE MAGIC I'VE SEEN RECENTLY, I'M BEGINNING TO GET SUSPICIOUS ABOUT THAT "GOLDEN MEAD" SHE GAVE HIM.
CERTAINLY, ROGER. BUT FIRST, I MUST NEEDS MAKE A PHONE CALL.
MY EMPLOYER NO DOUBT HAS BEEN WONDERING WHAT HAS BECOME OF ME RECENTLY AND I WOULD SPEAK WITH JERRY.
UH...SAY, THOR, CAN I TALK TO YOU FOR A COUPLE OF SECONDS... ALONE.
♪ OH, ROGER... ♪
WHILE THOR'S ON THE PHONE, COULD I SEE YOU FOR JUST A MOMENT?
WELL...
OH, PLEASE. IT WON'T TAKE LONG.
LET'S GO OUT ON THE BALCONY SO WE WON'T DISTURB HIM.
HELLO, JERRY? IT'S SIGURD JARLSON.


SIGURD! SPEAK OF THE DEVIL! WHEN ONE OF MY BEST WORKERS DOESN'T SHOW UP, I START TO WORRY.
TO TELL THE TRUTH, I SUSPECTED AS MUCH WHEN COUSIN NICK GOT YOU THE JOB.
I SEE. YUP. WORK OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE, HUH? CAN'T SAY MUCH ABOUT IT. COULD BE AWAY FOR SOME TIME?
NO PROBLEM. YOU EVER NEED ANOTHER ONE, COME 'ROUND AND SEE ME. 'BYE.
IF HE'S WORKING FOR SHIELD*, HE PROBABLY ISN'T SPIDER-MAN. WONDER IF SIGURD IS REALLY CAPTAIN AMERICA?
*SUPREME HQ INT'L ESPIONAGE LAW-ENFORCEMENT DIVISION--THE BIG BOYS.
WHILE ON THE BALCONY OUTSIDE LORELEI'S APARTMENT...
I KNOW WHAT YOU MUST BE THINKING, ROGER, BUT YOU'RE WRONG.
AM I?
YOU MUST BELIEVE ME. WHATEVER I'VE DONE, IT'S BEEN FOR THOR'S SAKE ALL ALONG.
HE NEEDS SOMEONE TO SHARE HIS LIFE WITH, SOMEONE WHO CAN GIVE HIM EVERYTHING HE NEEDS.
AS I CAN. PROMISE YOU WON'T TELL HIM ANYTHING.
WELL...
PROMISE...
I... I...
WHAT WAS IT YOU WANTED, ROGER?
IT WAS... I...
UH, NOTHING, THOR.
NOW THAT THAT'S SETTLED, WOULD EVERYBODY LIKE A DRINK?
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT. I ACTUALLY CAN'T GET OUT THE WORDS. AS THOUGH I'VE BEEN BLOCKED AGAINST IT.

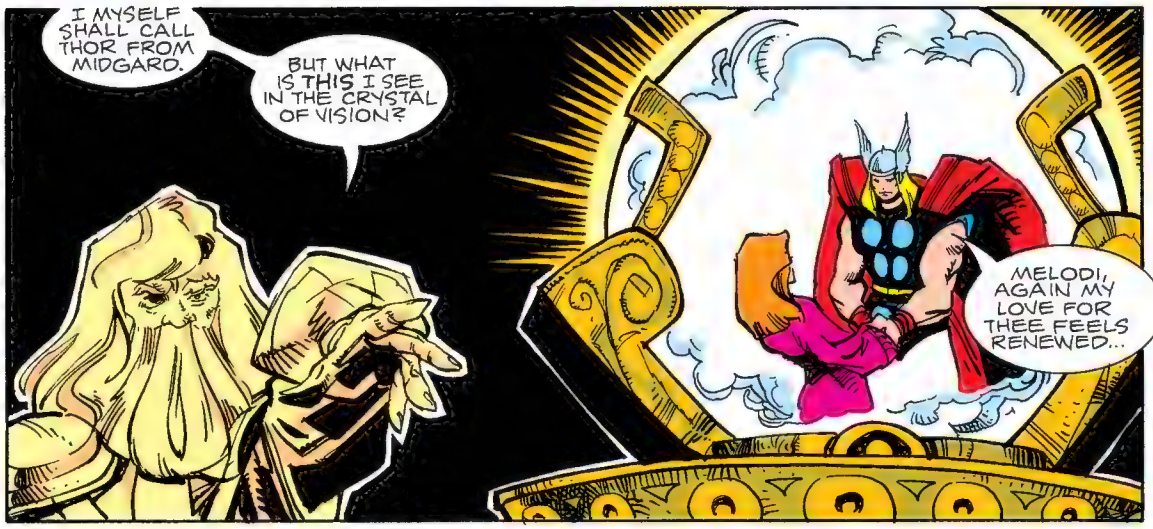

ROGER, ARE YOU...
MUST BE THE AFTER-EFFECT OF VORTEX TRAVEL. I FEEL DIZZY ALL OF A SUDDEN... AS IT... OOPS!
krash
GEEZ, I'M TERRIBLY SORRY.
WHAT A MESS. GOT ANY PAPER TOWELS?
IN THE KITCHEN, ROGER. AND TRY NOT TO BREAK ANYTHING ELSE.
THOR, YOU SAVED MY LIFE AND EVEN IF I CAN'T TELL YOU WHAT'S HAPPENING, I CAN STILL DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.
WHATEVER MELOD! REALLY IS, YOU WERE OKAY TILL YOU HAD A SLUG OF THAT MEAD.
THAT ANCIENT EARTHENWARE POT! THAT MUST BE WHERE SHE KEEPS THE STUFF!
BINGO!
I'LL JUST ADD A LITTLE HONEY AND WATER AND WE'RE SET.
MAYBE I CAN'T STOP YOU FROM TAKING IT, BUT I CAN SURE CUT DOWN THE DOSAGE!
HERE THEY ARE. TOOK ME A SECOND TO FIND 'EM.
WE'RE ALMOST DONE. NOW HOW ABOUT THAT DRINK?
AN EXCELLENT IDEA. I WELCOME THE OPPORTUNITY TO SAMPLE A LITTLE MORE OF THE GOLDEN MEAD.
I, TOO, WELCOME THE OPPORTUNITY, MIGHTY THOR, TO SEE YOU DRINK MORE OF MY ENCHANTED LIQUID...
...FOR REPEATED DRAUGHTS WILL ONLY INCREASE YOUR DEPENDENCY ON THE MEAD AND YOUR LOVE FOR ME...
...TILL YOU BURN NIGHT AND DAY WITH DESIRE AND ONLY LORELEI WILL BE ABLE TO ASSUAGE YOUR FEVER.

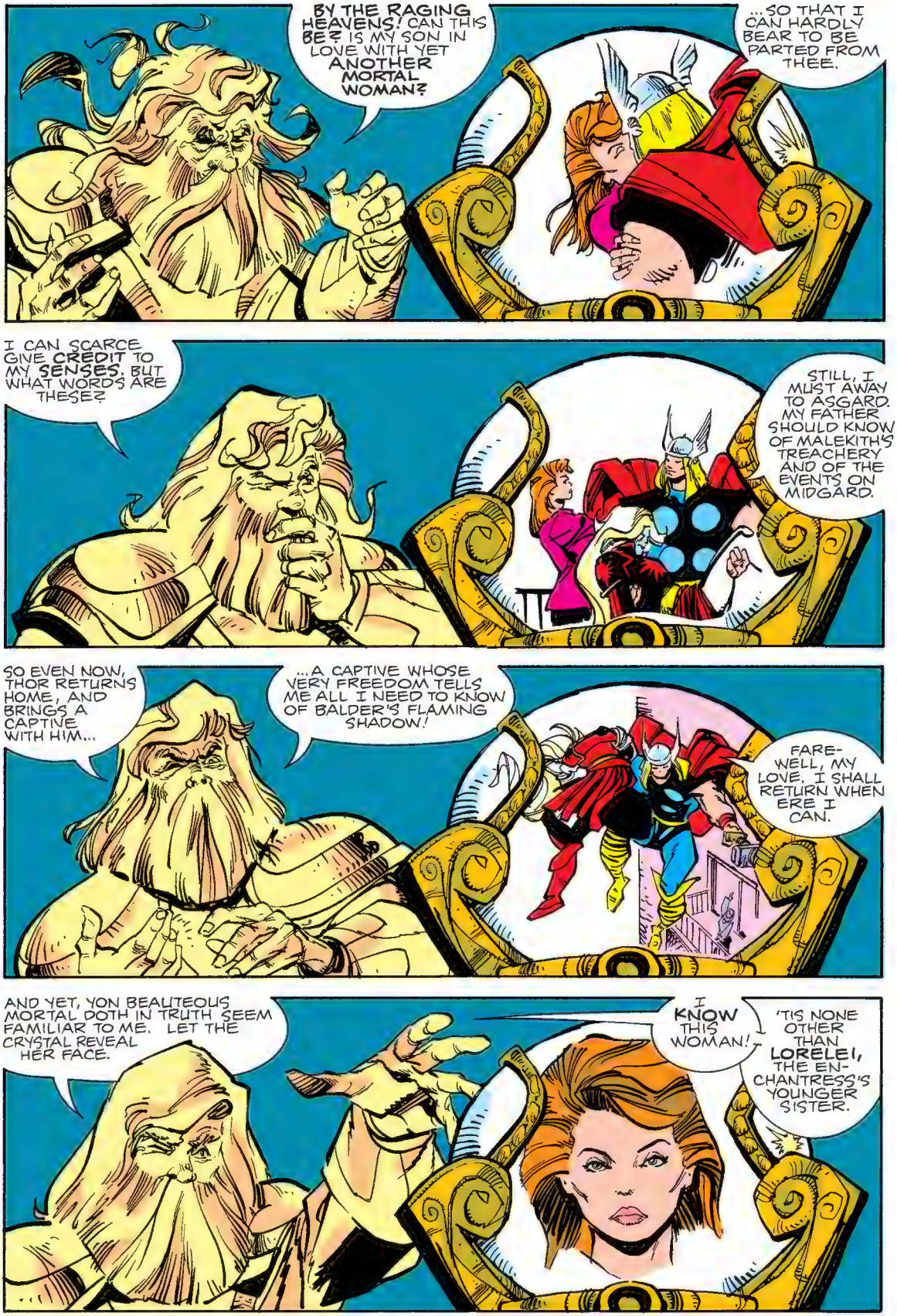
MEANWHILE, OUTSIDE THE GATES OF ASGARD, HOME OF THE NORSE GODS, THE STEED SILVERHOOF CARRYING BALDER THE BRAVE AND AGNAR OF VANAHEIM THUNDERS TOWARDS THE SHINING CITY...
THE END OF OUR WILD RIDE IS IN SIGHT, MY FRIEND.
BUT WE MUST PAUSE NOT A MOMENT, FOR IF MY DREAM SPOKE TRULY, ALL OUR LIVES MAY BE IN DANGER.
HE THUNDERS THROUGH THE GATES AT FULL TILT AND THE GUARDS MAKE WAY BEFORE HIS GRIM VISAGE.
WHAT A FOOL I WAS TO EVER TRY TO ENGAGE HIM IN SINGLE COMBAT.
AND YET, HE NEITHER SLEW ME, NOR HUMILIATED ME BEFORE VOLSTAGG...
...AS I KNOW NOW HE MIGHT HAVE DONE WITHOUT THE SLIGHTEST EFFORT*...
...SO MATCHLESS A MAN AT ARMS IS HE.
GOOD AGNAR, TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE NOW.
*BACK AROUND THOR 338.
WOULD YOU SEE THAT SILVERHOOF IS STABLED PROPERLY WHILE I AWAY TO LORD ODIN?
I KNOW I CAN DEPEND UPON YOU.
WE SHALL MEET AGAIN.
HE KNEW! HE KNEW WHO I WAS ALL THE TIME!
AND RODE WITH HIS BACK UNDEFENDED AGAINST ME THOUGH I HAD TRIED TO SLAY HIM.
GODSPEED, WARRIOR. I OWE YOU MORE THAN I CAN SAY. YES, WE SHALL MEET AGAIN!

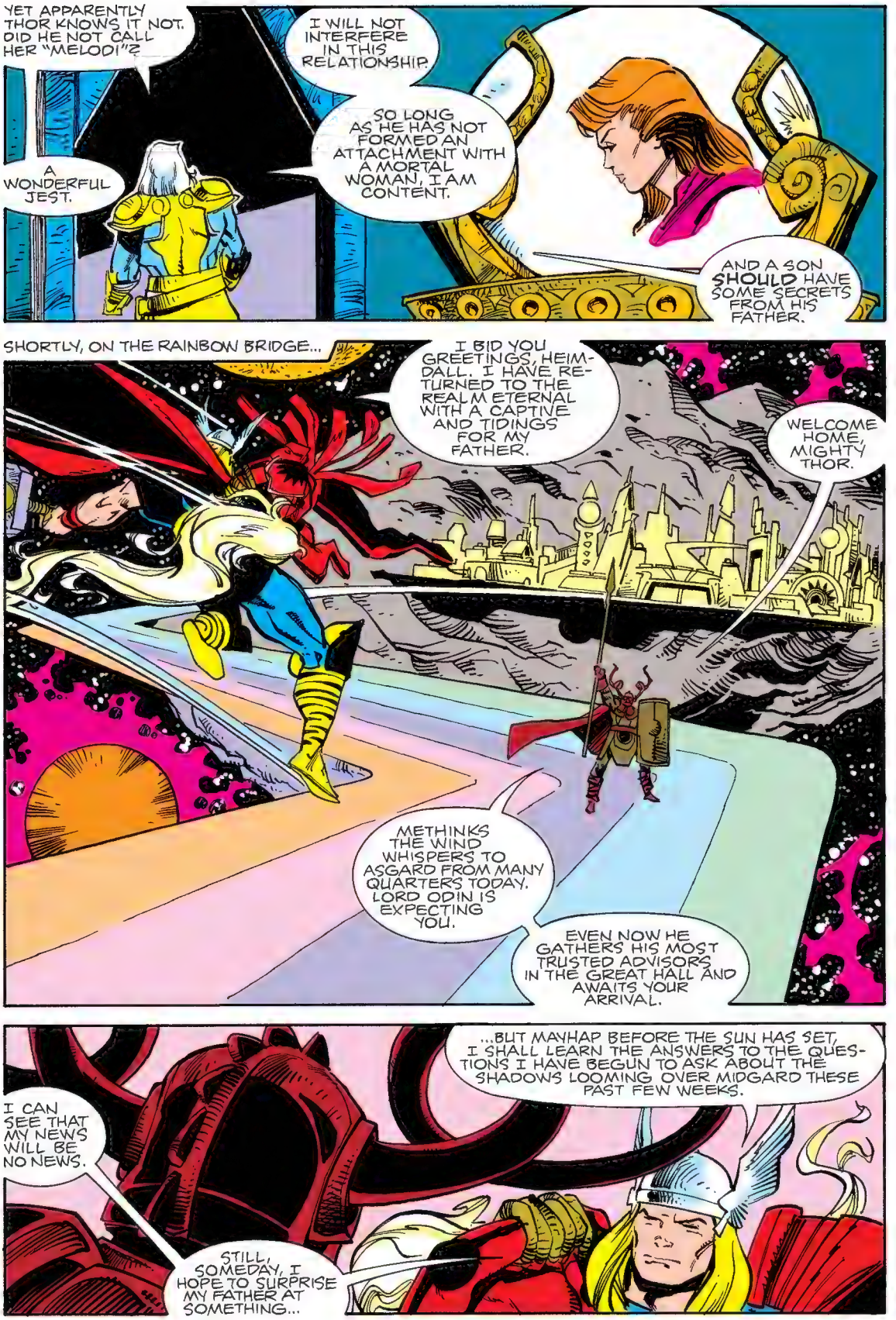

MOMENTS LATER, IN ODIN'S GREAT HALL OF VALASKJALF...
PEACE, CHAMBERLAIN.
MY LIEGE, I BEAR TIDINGS...
NOBLE BALDER, SURELY THIS IS A MOST UNDECOROUS WAY TO GREET--
BALDER WOULD BREAK IN UPON US ONLY IF THE NECESSITY WERE MOST DIRE.
I SENT HIM ON AN ERRAND ALMOST CERTAINLY DOOMED TO FAILURE...
...AND YET HE HAS RETURNED FROM THE DESERT WITH A WARNING FOR THE REALM...
...WHEN HE MIGHT HAVE SPENT HIS DAYS IN BITTER CONTEMPLATION OF HIS LIEGE.

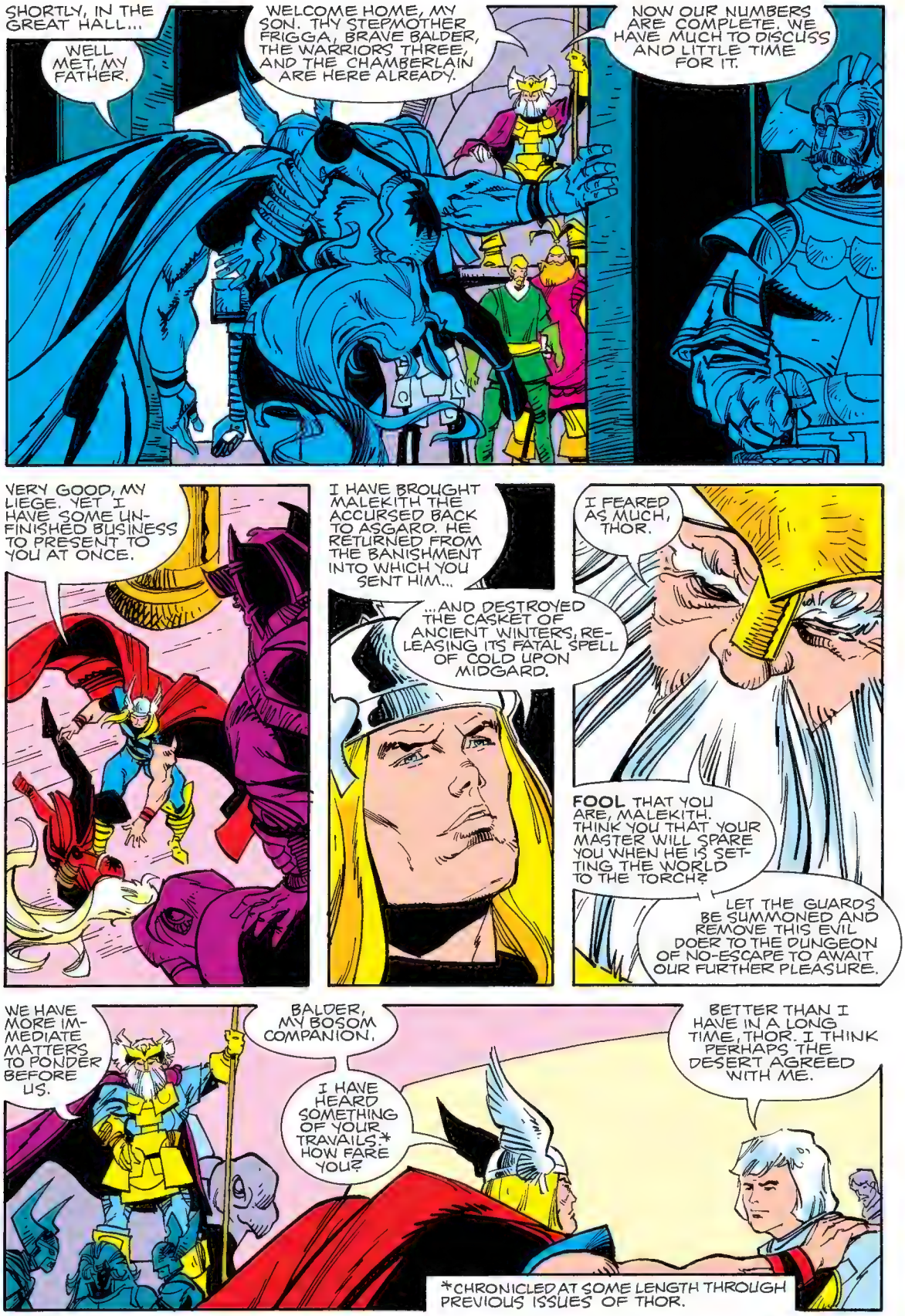
BRAVE BALDER, YOU ARE THE NOBLEST ASGARDIAN OF ALL.
IT DOES NOT MATTER NOW, MY LORD, FOR I HAVE SEEN AN ENIGMA SO VAST AND DANGEROUS THAT ONLY YOU MIGHT READ ITS RIDDLE.
THE NORNS HAVE SHOWN ME A VISION* OF A BURNING SHADOW THAT THREATENS NOT ONLY THE GOLDEN REALM, BUT ALL WHO LIVE!
*LAST ISSUE.

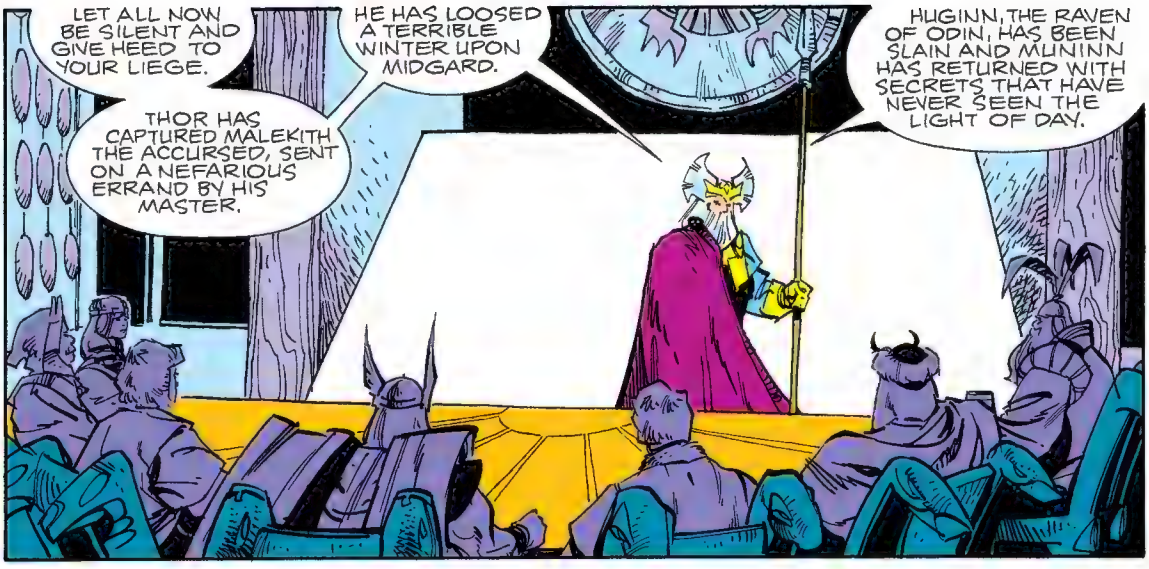
THIS, THEN, IS THE CONFIRMATION OF ALL MY FEARS.
SPEEDILY, BRAVE BALDER, SUMMON THOU MY MOST TRUSTED ADVISORS.
CHAMBERLAIN, PREPARE THE COUNCIL ROOM.

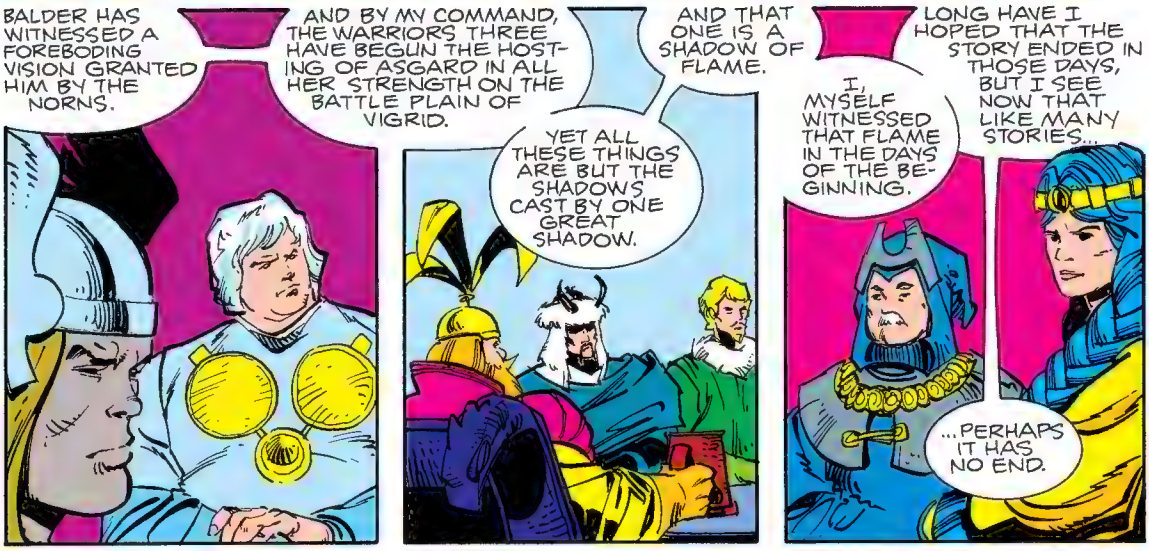

I MYSELF SHALL CALL THOR FROM MIDGARD.
BUT WHAT IS THIS I SEE IN THE CRYSTAL OF VISION?
MELODI, AGAIN MY LOVE FOR THEE FEELS RENEWED...

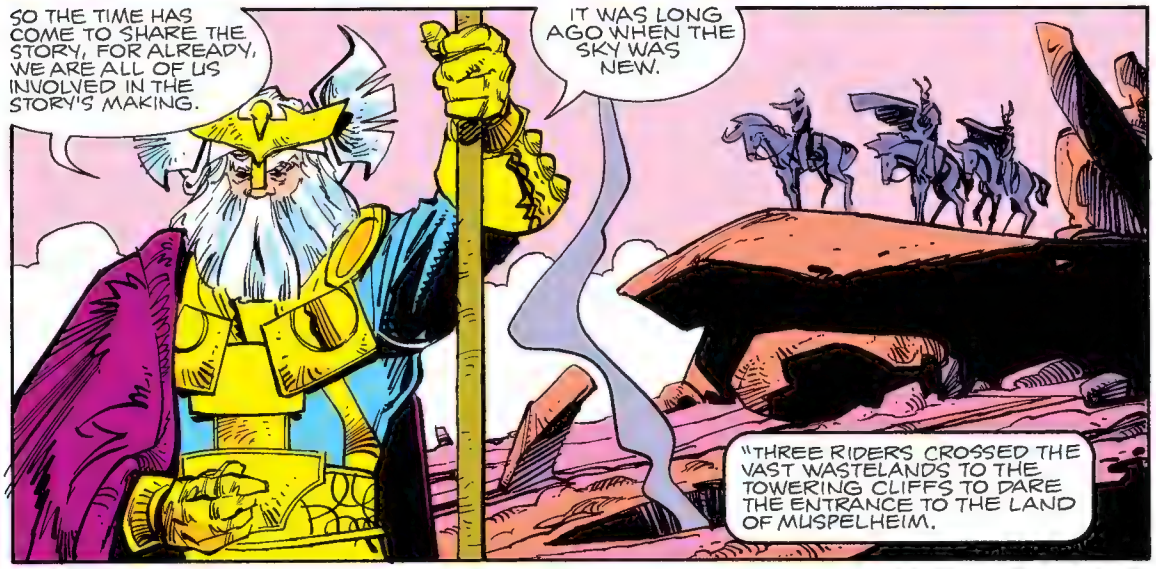

BY THE RAGING HEAVENS! CAN THIS BE? IS MY SON IN LOVE WITH YET ANOTHER MORTAL WOMAN?
...SO THAT I CAN HARDLY BEAR TO BE PARTED FROM THEE.
I CAN SCARCE GIVE CREDIT TO MY SENSES. BUT WHAT WORDS ARE THESE?
STILL, I MUST AWAY TO ASGARD. MY FATHER SHOULD KNOW OF MALEKITH'S TREACHERY AND OF THE EVENTS ON MIDGARD.
SO EVEN NOW, THOR RETURNS HOME, AND BRINGS A CAPTIVE WITH HIM...
...A CAPTIVE WHOSE VERY FREEDOM TELLS ME ALL I NEED TO KNOW OF BALDER'S FLAMING SHADOW!
FARE-WELL, MY LOVE. I SHALL RETURN WHEN ERE I CAN.
AND YET, YON BEAUTEOUS MORTAL DOTH IN TRUTH SEEM FAMILIAR TO ME. LET THE CRYSTAL REVEAL HER FACE.
I KNOW THIS WOMAN!
'TIS NONE OTHER THAN LORELEI, THE EN-CHANTRESS'S YOUNGER SISTER.

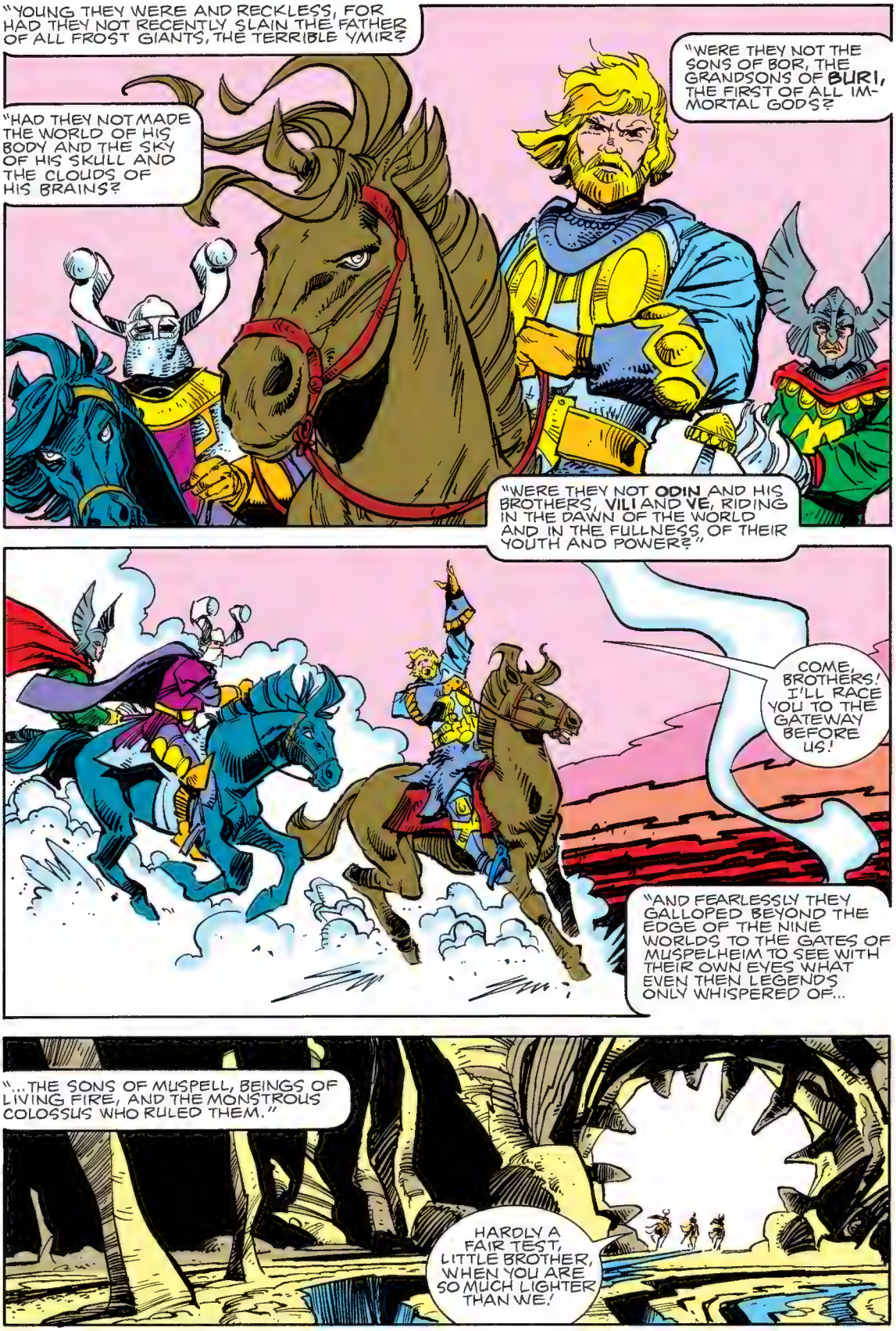

YET APPARENTLY THOR KNOWS IT NOT. DID HE NOT CALL HER "MELODI"?
A WONDERFUL JEST.
I WILL NOT INTERFERE IN THIS RELATIONSHIP.
SO LONG AS HE HAS NOT FORMED AN ATTACHMENT WITH A MORTAL WOMAN, I AM CONTENT.
AND A SON SHOULD HAVE SOME SECRETS FROM HIS FATHER.
SHORTLY, ON THE RAINBOW BRIDGE...
I BID YOU GREETINGS, HEIMDALL. I HAVE RETURNED TO THE REALM ETERNAL WITH A CAPTIVE AND TIDINGS FOR MY FATHER.
WELCOME HOME, MIGHTY THOR.
METHINKS THE WIND WHISPERS TO ASGARD FROM MANY QUARTERS TODAY. LORD ODIN IS EXPECTING YOU.
EVEN NOW HE GATHERS HIS MOST TRUSTED ADVISORS IN THE GREAT HALL AND AWAITS YOUR ARRIVAL.
...BUT MAYHAP BEFORE THE SUN HAS SET, I SHALL LEARN THE ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS I HAVE BEGUN TO ASK ABOUT THE SHADOWS LOOMING OVER MIDGARD THESE PAST FEW WEEKS.
I CAN SEE THAT MY NEWS WILL BE NO NEWS.
STILL, SOMEDAY, I HOPE TO SURPRISE MY FATHER AT SOMETHING...

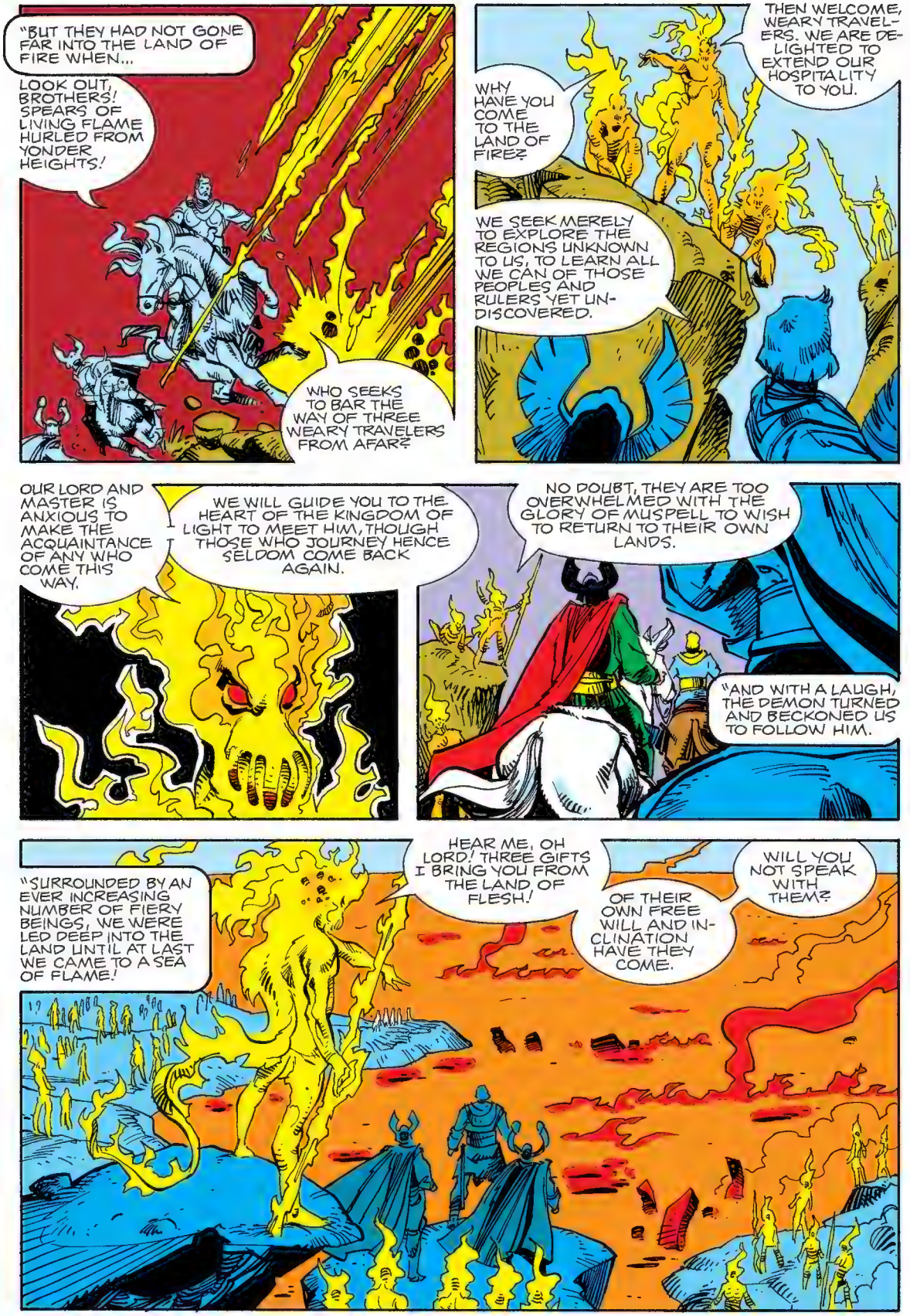

SHORTLY, IN THE GREAT HALL...
WELL MET, MY FATHER.
WELCOME HOME, MY SON. THY STEPMOTHER FRIGGA, BRAVE BALDER, THE WARRIORS THREE, AND THE CHAMBERLAIN ARE HERE ALREADY.
NOW OUR NUMBERS ARE COMPLETE. WE HAVE MUCH TO DISCUSS AND LITTLE TIME FOR IT.
VERY GOOD, MY LIEGE. YET I HAVE SOME UNFINISHED BUSINESS TO PRESENT TO YOU AT ONCE.
I HAVE BROUGHT MALEKITH THE ACCURSED BACK TO ASGARD. HE RETURNED FROM THE BANISHMENT INTO WHICH YOU SENT HIM...
...AND DESTROYED THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS, RELEASING ITS FATAL SPELL OF COLD UPON MIDGARD.
I FEARED AS MUCH, THOR.
FOOL THAT YOU ARE, MALEKITH. THINK YOU THAT YOUR MASTER WILL SPARE YOU WHEN HE IS SETTING THE WORLD TO THE TORCH?
LET THE GUARDS BE SUMMONED AND REMOVE THIS EVIL DOER TO THE DUNGEON OF NO-ESCAPE TO AWAIT OUR FURTHER PLEASURE.
WE HAVE MORE IMMEDIATE MATTERS TO PONDER BEFORE US.
BALDER, MY BOSOM COMPANION,
I HAVE HEARD SOMETHING OF YOUR TRAVAILS.* HOW FARE YOU?
BETTER THAN I HAVE IN A LONG TIME, THOR. I THINK PERHAPS THE DESERT AGREED WITH ME.
*CHRONICLED AT SOME LENGTH THROUGH PREVIOUS ISSUES OF THOR.

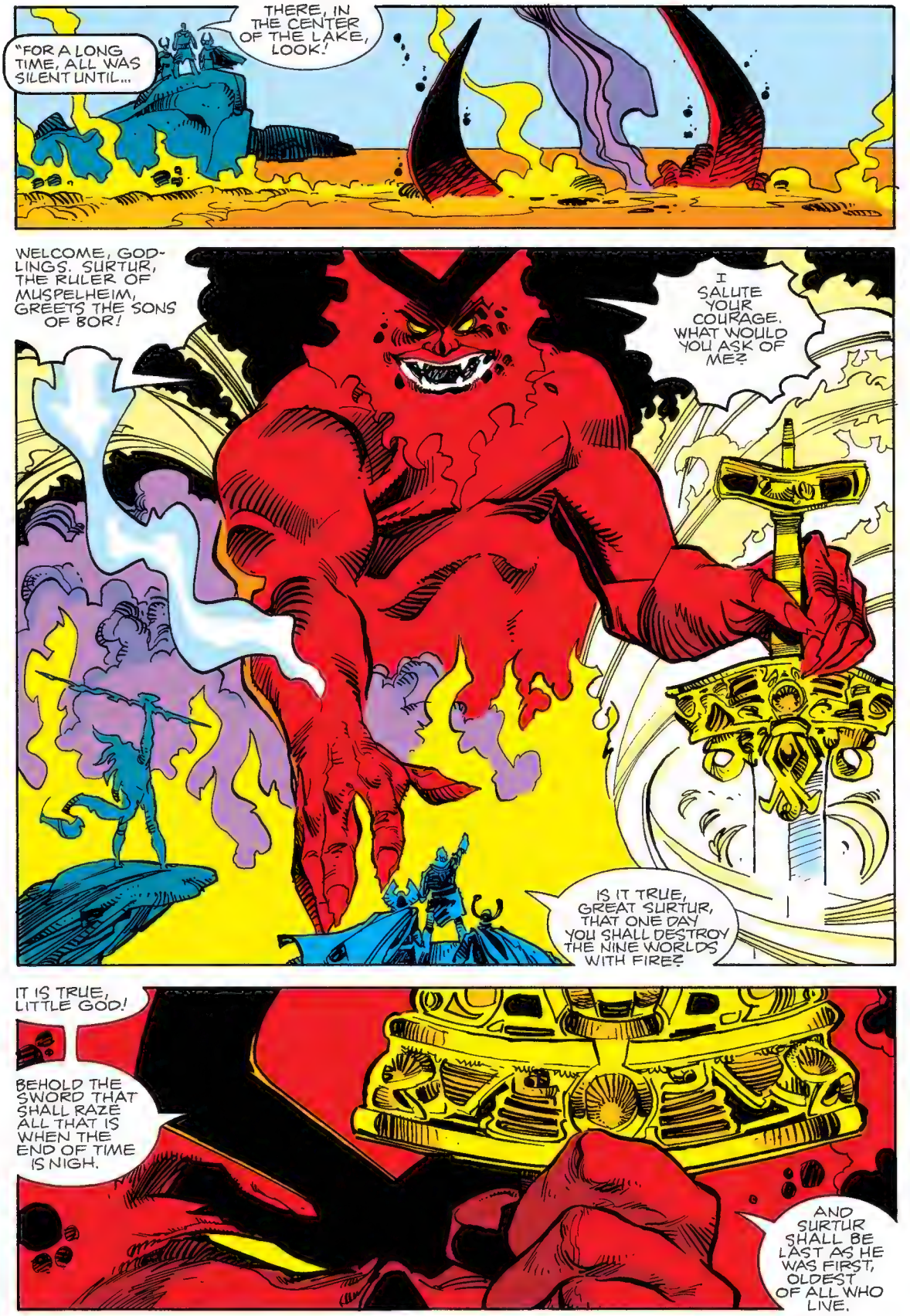

LET ALL NOW BE SILENT AND GIVE HEED TO YOUR LIEGE.
HE HAS LOOSED A TERRIBLE WINTER UPON MIDGARD.
HUGINN, THE RAVEN OF ODIN, HAS BEEN SLAIN AND MUNINN HAS RETURNED WITH SECRETS THAT HAVE NEVER SEEN THE LIGHT OF DAY.
THOR HAS CAPTURED MALEKITH THE ACCURSED, SENT ON A NEFARIOUS ERRAND BY HIS MASTER.

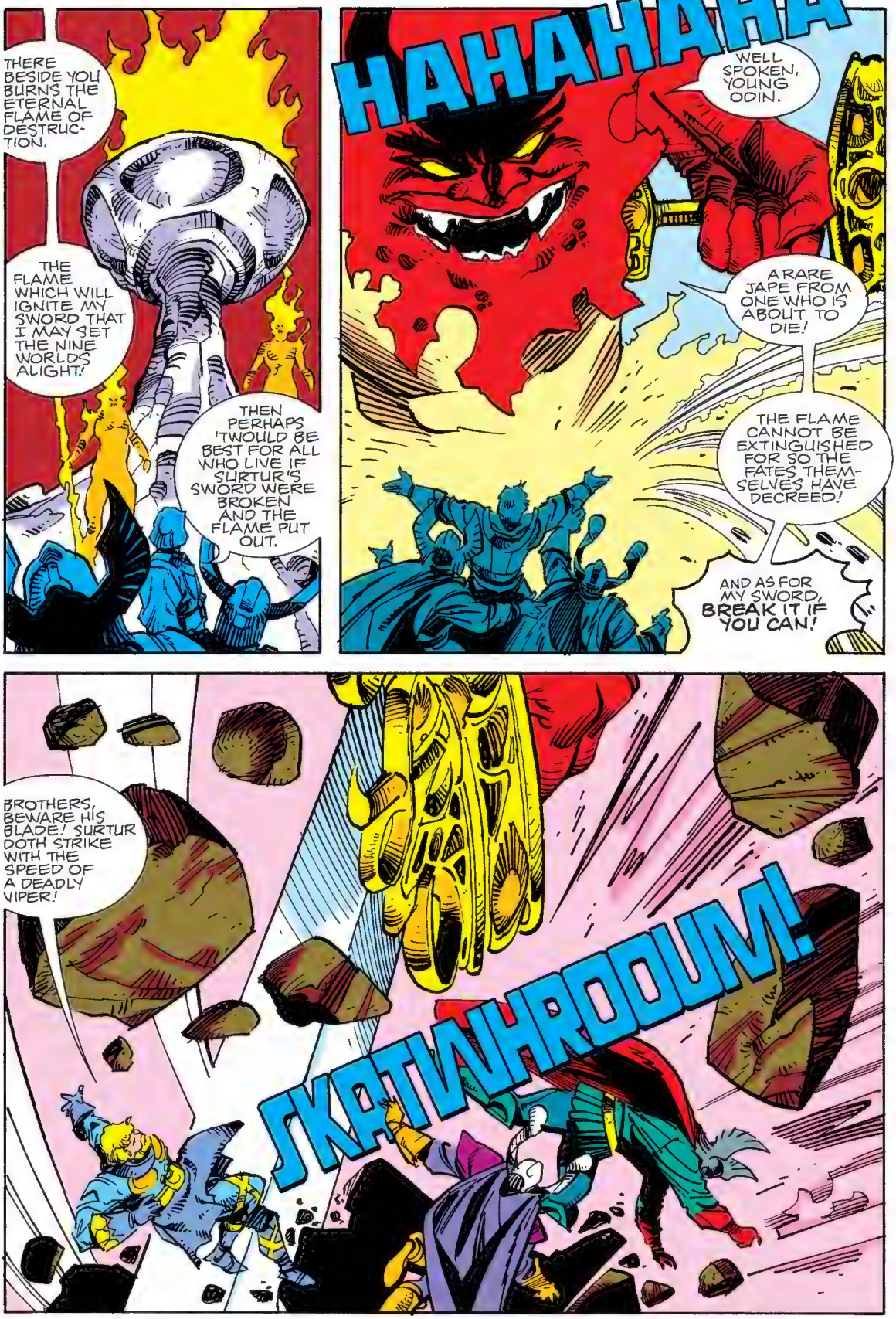

BALDER HAS WITNESSED A FOREBODING VISION GRANTED HIM BY THE NORNS.
AND BY MY COMMAND, THE WARRIORS THREE HAVE BEGUN THE HOSTING OF ASGARD IN ALL HER STRENGTH ON THE BATTLE PLAIN OF VIGRID.
AND THAT ONE IS A SHADOW OF FLAME.
YET ALL THESE THINGS ARE BUT THE SHADOWS CAST BY ONE GREAT SHADOW.
I, MYSELF WITNESSED THAT FLAME IN THE DAYS OF THE BEGINNING.
LONG HAVE I HOPED THAT THE STORY ENDED IN THOSE DAYS, BUT I SEE NOW THAT LIKE MANY STORIES...
...PERHAPS IT HAS NO END.

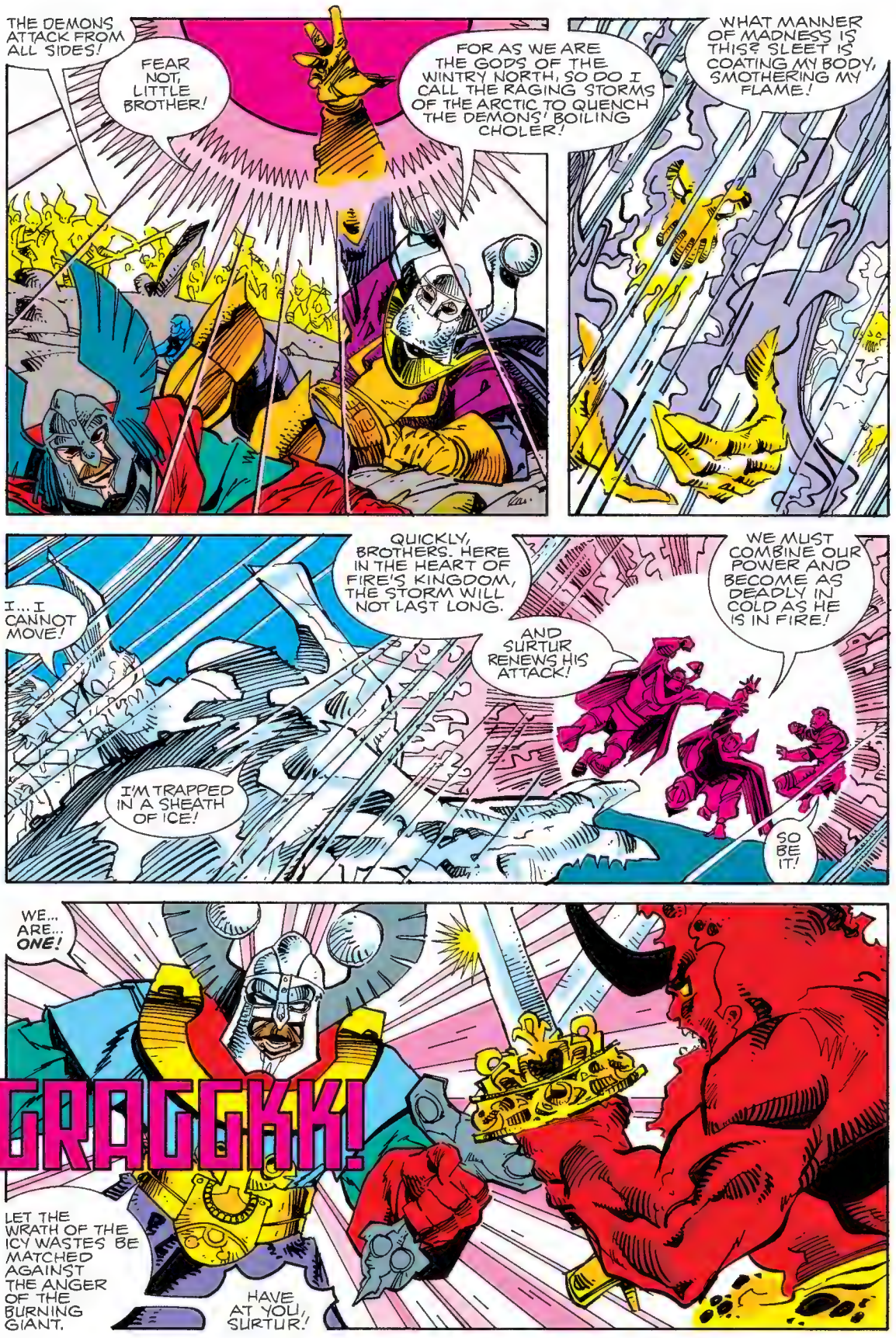

SO THE TIME HAS COME TO SHARE THE STORY, FOR ALREADY, WE ARE ALL OF US INVOLVED IN THE STORY'S MAKING.
IT WAS LONG AGO WHEN THE SKY WAS NEW.
"THREE RIDERS CROSSED THE VAST WASTELANDS TO THE TOWERING CLIFFS TO DARE THE ENTRANCE TO THE LAND OF MUSPELHEIM.

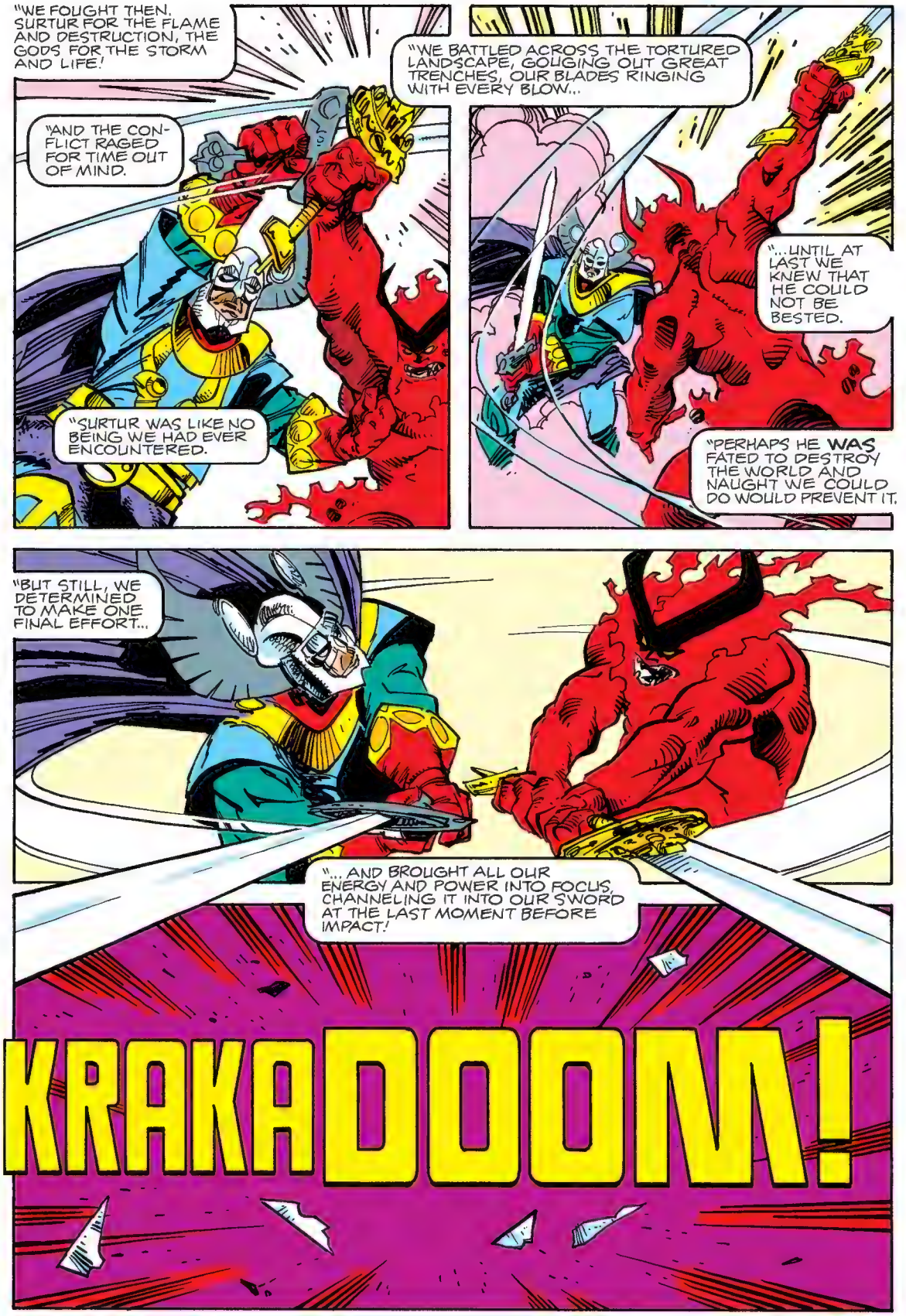

"YOUNG THEY WERE AND RECKLESS, FOR HAD THEY NOT RECENTLY SLAIN THE FATHER OF ALL FROST GIANTS, THE TERRIBLE YMIR?
"HAD THEY NOT MADE THE WORLD OF HIS BODY AND THE SKY OF HIS SKULL AND THE CLOUDS OF HIS BRAINS?
"WERE THEY NOT THE SONS OF BOR, THE GRANDSONS OF BURI, THE FIRST OF ALL IMMORTAL GODS?
"WERE THEY NOT ODIN AND HIS BROTHERS, VILI AND VE, RIDING IN THE DAWN OF THE WORLD AND IN THE FULLNESS OF THEIR YOUTH AND POWER?"
COME, BROTHERS! I'LL RACE YOU TO THE GATEWAY BEFORE US!
"AND FEARLESSLY THEY GALLOPED BEYOND THE EDGE OF THE NINE WORLDS TO THE GATES OF MUSPELHEIM TO SEE WITH THEIR OWN EYES WHAT EVEN THEN LEGENDS ONLY WHISPERED OF...
"...THE SONS OF MUSPELL, BEINGS OF LIVING FIRE, AND THE MONSTROUS COLOSSUS WHO RULED THEM."
HARDLY A FAIR TEST, LITTLE BROTHER, WHEN YOU ARE SO MUCH LIGHTER THAN WE!

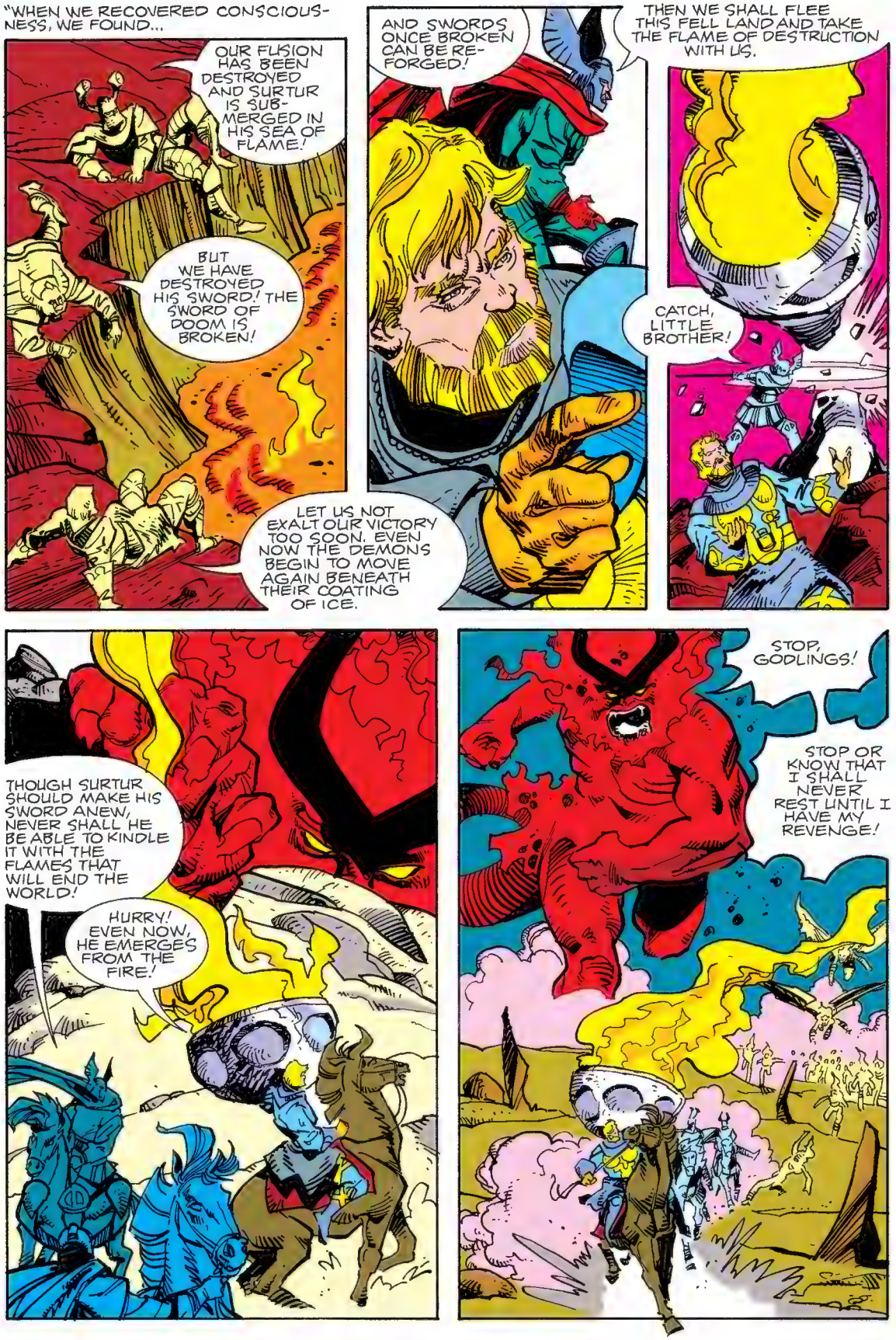

"BUT THEY HAD NOT GONE FAR INTO THE LAND OF FIRE WHEN...
LOOK OUT, BROTHERS! SPEARS OF LIVING FLAME HURLED FROM YONDER HEIGHTS!
WHO SEEKS TO BAR THE WAY OF THREE WEARY TRAVELERS FROM AFAR?
THEN WELCOME, WEARY TRAVELERS. WE ARE DELIGHTED TO EXTEND OUR HOSPITALITY TO YOU.
WHY HAVE YOU COME TO THE LAND OF FIRE?
WE SEEK MERELY TO EXPLORE THE REGIONS UNKNOWN TO US, TO LEARN ALL WE CAN OF THOSE PEOPLES AND RULERS YET UNDISCOVERED.
OUR LORD AND MASTER IS ANXIOUS TO MAKE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF ANY WHO COME THIS WAY.
WE WILL GUIDE YOU TO THE HEART OF THE KINGDOM OF LIGHT TO MEET HIM, THOUGH THOSE WHO JOURNEY HENCE SELDOM COME BACK AGAIN.
NO DOUBT, THEY ARE TOO OVERWHELMED WITH THE GLORY OF MUSPELL TO WISH TO RETURN TO THEIR OWN LANDS.
"AND WITH A LAUGH, THE DEMON TURNED AND BECKONED US TO FOLLOW HIM.
"SURROUNDED BY AN EVER INCREASING NUMBER OF FIERY BEINGS, WE WERE LED DEEP INTO THE LAND UNTIL AT LAST WE CAME TO A SEA OF FLAME!
HEAR ME, OH LORD! THREE GIFTS I BRING YOU FROM THE LAND OF FLESH!
OF THEIR OWN FREE WILL AND INCLINATION HAVE THEY COME.
WILL YOU NOT SPEAK WITH THEM?

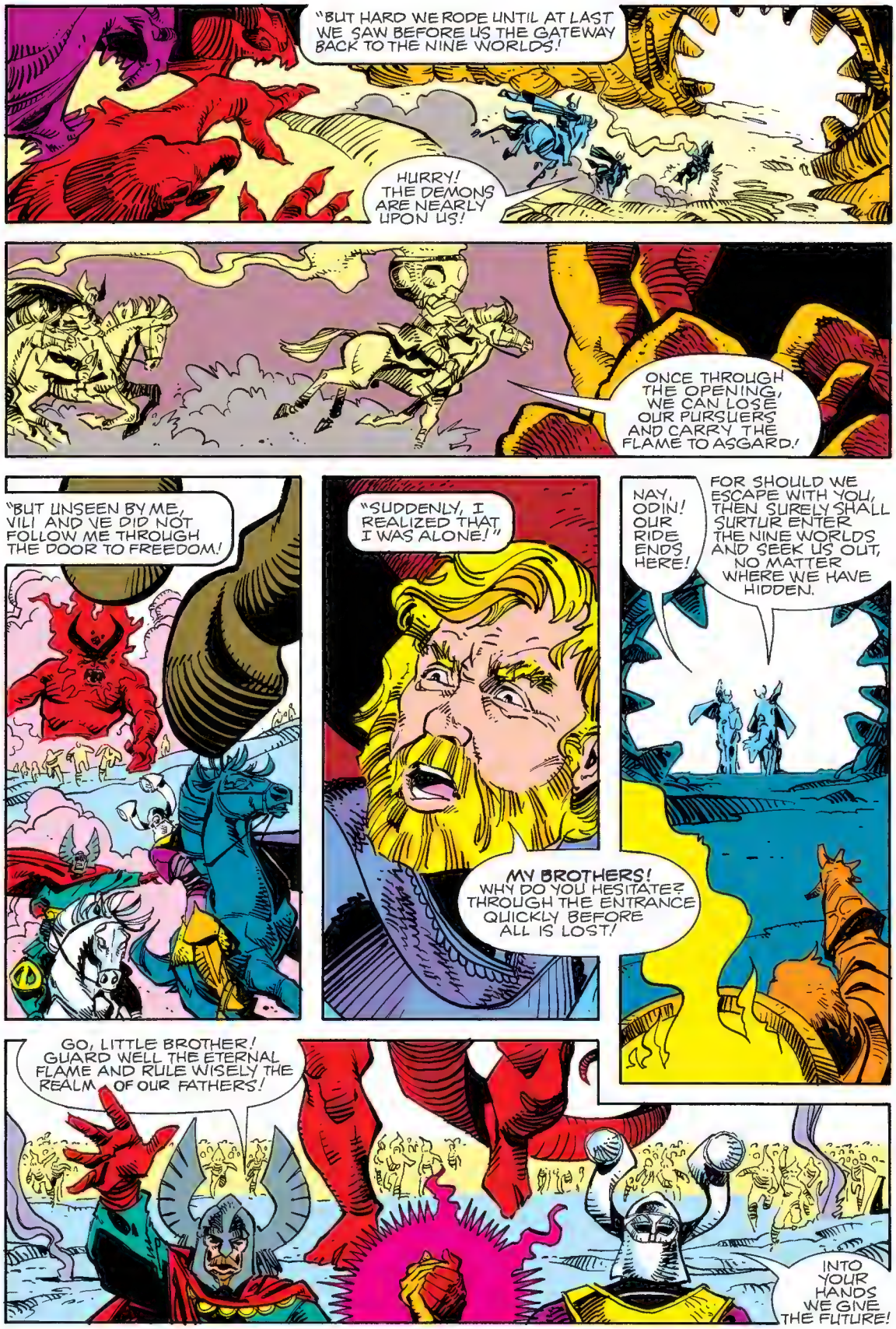

"FOR A LONG TIME, ALL WAS SILENT UNTIL...
THERE, IN THE CENTER OF THE LAKE, LOOK!
WELCOME, GODLINGS. SURTUR, THE RULER OF MUSPELHEIM, GREETS THE SONS OF BOR!
I SALUTE YOUR COURAGE. WHAT WOULD YOU ASK OF ME?
IS IT TRUE, GREAT SURTUR, THAT ONE DAY YOU SHALL DESTROY THE NINE WORLDS WITH FIRE?
IT IS TRUE, LITTLE GOD!
BEHOLD THE SWORD THAT SHALL RAZE ALL THAT IS WHEN THE END OF TIME IS NIGH.
AND SURTUR SHALL BE LAST AS HE WAS FIRST, OLDEST OF ALL WHO LIVE.

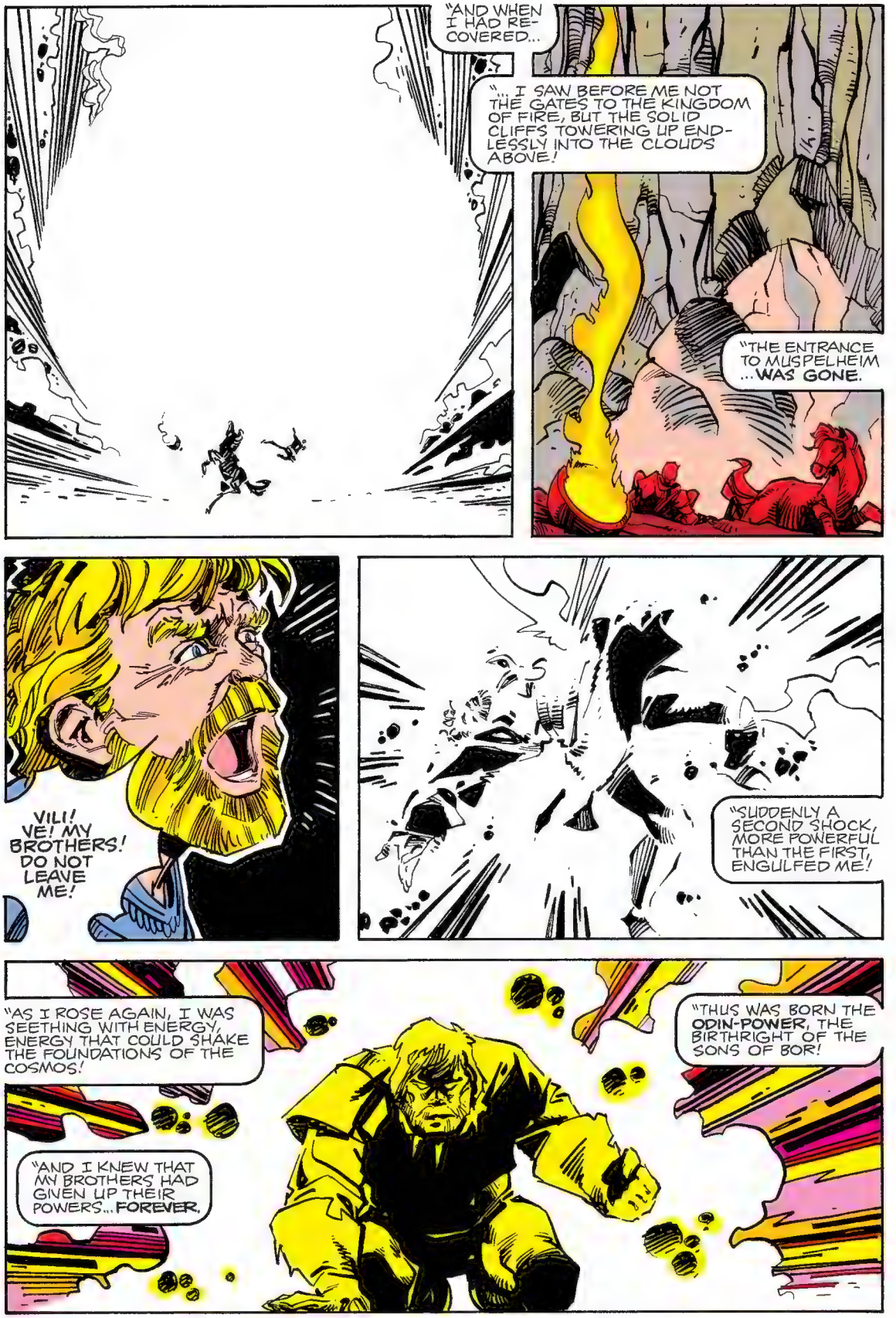

THERE BESIDE YOU BURNS THE ETERNAL FLAME OF DESTRUC-TION.
THE FLAME WHICH WILL IGNITE MY SWORD THAT I MAY SET THE NINE WORLDS ALIGHT!
THEN PERHAPS 'TWOULD BE BEST FOR ALL WHO LIVE IF SURTUR'S SWORD WERE BROKEN AND THE FLAME PUT OUT.
HAHAHAHA
WELL SPOKEN, YOUNG ODIN.
A RARE JAPE FROM ONE WHO IS ABOUT TO DIE!
THE FLAME CANNOT BE EXTINGUISHED FOR SO THE FATES THEM-SELVES HAVE DECREED!
AND AS FOR MY SWORD, BREAK IT IF YOU CAN!
BROTHERS, BEWARE HIS BLADE! SURTUR DOTH STRIKE WITH THE SPEED OF A DEADLY VIPER!
SKRATUHROOUM!


THE DEMONS ATTACK FROM ALL SIDES!
FEAR NOT, LITTLE BROTHER!
FOR AS WE ARE THE GODS OF THE WINTRY NORTH, SO DO I CALL THE RAGING STORMS OF THE ARCTIC TO QUENCH THE DEMONS' BOILING CHOLER!
WHAT MANNER OF MADNESS IS THIS? SLEET IS COATING MY BODY, SMOTHERING MY FLAME!
I... I CANNOT MOVE!
QUICKLY, BROTHERS. HERE IN THE HEART OF FIRE'S KINGDOM, THE STORM WILL NOT LAST LONG.
AND SURTUR RENEWS HIS ATTACK!
WE MUST COMBINE OUR POWER AND BECOME AS DEADLY IN COLD AS HE IS IN FIRE!
I'M TRAPPED IN A SHEATH OF ICE!
SO BE IT!
WE... ARE... ONE!
GRAGGKK!
LET THE WRATH OF THE ICY WASTES BE MATCHED AGAINST THE ANGER OF THE BURNING GIANT.
HAVE AT YOU, SURTUR!


"WE FOUGHT THEN, SURTUR FOR THE FLAME AND DESTRUCTION, THE GODS FOR THE STORM AND LIFE!
"AND THE CONFLICT RAGED FOR TIME OUT OF MIND.
"SURTUR WAS LIKE NO BEING WE HAD EVER ENCOUNTERED.
"WE BATTLED ACROSS THE TORTURED LANDSCAPE, GOUGING OUT GREAT TRENCHES, OUR BLADES RINGING WITH EVERY BLOW...
"...UNTIL AT LAST WE KNEW THAT HE COULD NOT BE BESTED.
"PERHAPS HE WAS FATED TO DESTROY THE WORLD AND NAUGHT WE COULD DO WOULD PREVENT IT.
"BUT STILL, WE DETERMINED TO MAKE ONE FINAL EFFORT...
"... AND BROUGHT ALL OUR ENERGY AND POWER INTO FOCUS, CHANNELING IT INTO OUR SWORD AT THE LAST MOMENT BEFORE IMPACT!
KRAKADOOM!


"WHEN WE RECOVERED CONSCIOUSNESS, WE FOUND...
OUR FUSION HAS BEEN DESTROYED AND SURTUR IS SUBMERGED IN HIS SEA OF FLAME!
BUT WE HAVE DESTROYED HIS SWORD! THE SWORD OF DOOM IS BROKEN!
LET US NOT EXALT OUR VICTORY TOO SOON. EVEN NOW THE DEMONS BEGIN TO MOVE AGAIN BENEATH THEIR COATING OF ICE.
AND SWORDS ONCE BROKEN CAN BE RE-FORGED!
THEN WE SHALL FLEE THIS FELL LAND AND TAKE THE FLAME OF DESTRUCTION WITH US.
CATCH, LITTLE BROTHER!
THOUGH SURTUR SHOULD MAKE HIS SWORD ANEW, NEVER SHALL HE BE ABLE TO KINDLE IT WITH THE FLAMES THAT WILL END THE WORLD!
HURRY! EVEN NOW, HE EMERGES FROM THE FIRE!
STOP, GODLINGS!
STOP OR KNOW THAT I SHALL NEVER REST UNTIL I HAVE MY REVENGE!


"BUT HARD WE RODE UNTIL AT LAST WE SAW BEFORE US THE GATEWAY BACK TO THE NINE WORLDS!
HURRY! THE DEMONS ARE NEARLY UPON US!
ONCE THROUGH THE OPENING, WE CAN LOSE OUR PURSUERS AND CARRY THE FLAME TO ASGARD!
"BUT UNSEEN BY ME, VILI AND VE DID NOT FOLLOW ME THROUGH THE DOOR TO FREEDOM!
"SUDDENLY, I REALIZED THAT I WAS ALONE!"
MY BROTHERS! WHY DO YOU HESITATE? THROUGH THE ENTRANCE QUICKLY BEFORE ALL IS LOST!
NAY, ODIN! OUR RIDE ENDS HERE!
FOR SHOULD WE ESCAPE WITH YOU, THEN SURELY SHALL SURTUR ENTER THE NINE WORLDS AND SEEK US OUT, NO MATTER WHERE WE HAVE HIDDEN.
GO, LITTLE BROTHER! GUARD WELL THE ETERNAL FLAME AND RULE WISELY THE REALM OF OUR FATHERS!
INTO YOUR HANDS WE GIVE THE FUTURE!


"AND WHEN I HAD RECOVERED...
"... I SAW BEFORE ME NOT THE GATES TO THE KINGDOM OF FIRE, BUT THE SOLID CLIFFS TOWERING UP ENDLESSLY INTO THE CLOUDS ABOVE!
"THE ENTRANCE TO MUSPELHEIM ...WAS GONE.
VILI! VE! MY BROTHERS! DO NOT LEAVE ME!
"SUDDENLY A SECOND SHOCK, MORE POWERFUL THAN THE FIRST, ENGULFED ME!
"AS I ROSE AGAIN, I WAS SEETHING WITH ENERGY, ENERGY THAT COULD SHAKE THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE COSMOS!
"AND I KNEW THAT MY BROTHERS HAD GIVEN UP THEIR POWERS... FOREVER.
"THUS WAS BORN THE ODIN-POWER, THE BIRTHRIGHT OF THE SONS OF BOR!

ENOUGH POWER TO LEVEL A WORLD, TO OVERTHROW A UNIVERSE!
BUT NOT ENOUGH TO SAVE MY BROTHERS!
I KNEW THAT TO BREACH THE WALLS ONCE MORE WAS TO OPEN THE WORLD AGAIN TO SURTUR...
...AND THAT THE SACRIFICE OF MY BROTHERS WOULD BE IN VAIN.
OH, VILI! OH, VE! WOULD THAT WE HAD NEVER JOURNEYED TO THAT CURSED LAND!
AND YET, HAVE I NOT GUARDED THE ETERNAL FLAME, LO, THESE MANY EONS?
DOES IT NOT, EVEN NOW, RESIDE SAFE WITHIN THE WALLS OF ASGARD?
AND YET, SAFE NO LONGER!
FOR DEADLY SURTUR HAS AT LAST BREACHED THE WALLS OF MUSPELHEIM...
...SHATTERING THEM WHERE THEY WERE WEAKEST IN THE HEART OF THE BURNING GALAXY!
A GALAXY HE DESTROYED TO CREATE THE FORGE WHEREIN HE MIGHT REMAKE THE SWORD OF DOOM!
CERTAIN IT IS THAT SURTUR WILL SEEK OUT THE FOOT OF THE RAINBOW BRIDGE ON EARTH...
SO HAVE I CALLED THE HOSTING OF ASGARD.
...THAT HE MIGHT TRAVEL THEREBY TO ASGARD AND IGNITE THE SWORD OF DOOM IN THE ETERNAL FLAME!
ON EARTH, THEN, MUST THE FORCES OF ASGARD BE DEPLOYED AGAINST THE ONSLAUGHT OF THE SONS OF MUSPELL.
FORETELLING IS USELESS WHEN EVEN THE NORNS SEE THE FUTURE ONLY IN SHADOWS.
BUT NOW IS THE TIME WHEN ALL DEBTS MUST BE PAID.
THERE IS ONE WHOSE MIGHT WE SHALL SORELY NEED IN THE COMING TRIAL...
...WHOSE COURAGE AND POWER ARE THE EQUAL OF MY SON'S!

AND WHO UNDERSTOOD EVEN THEN THE PRICE I WOULD ASK IF THE MARCH OF EVIL THAT DESTROYED HIS HOME REACHED OUT FOR THE GOLDEN REALM.
NOW, FOR THE LIFELESS SHARDS OF HIS RAVAGED HOMELAND, FOR THE BLOOD I OWE MY BROTHERS...
...FOR THE SAKES OF ALL THOSE WHOSE VERY EXISTENCE MAKES THEM ENEMIES OF THE FIRE THAT DESTROYS...
I SUMMON TO ASGARD...
...BETA RAY BILL!
KATHOOM!
5-15-84

NEXT: **RAGNAROK AND ROLL!**

I WOULDN'T MISS THE NEXT ISSUE IF I WERE YOU, KIDS. YOU JUST MIGHT REGRET IT FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE. 'NUFF SAID!

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the mighty
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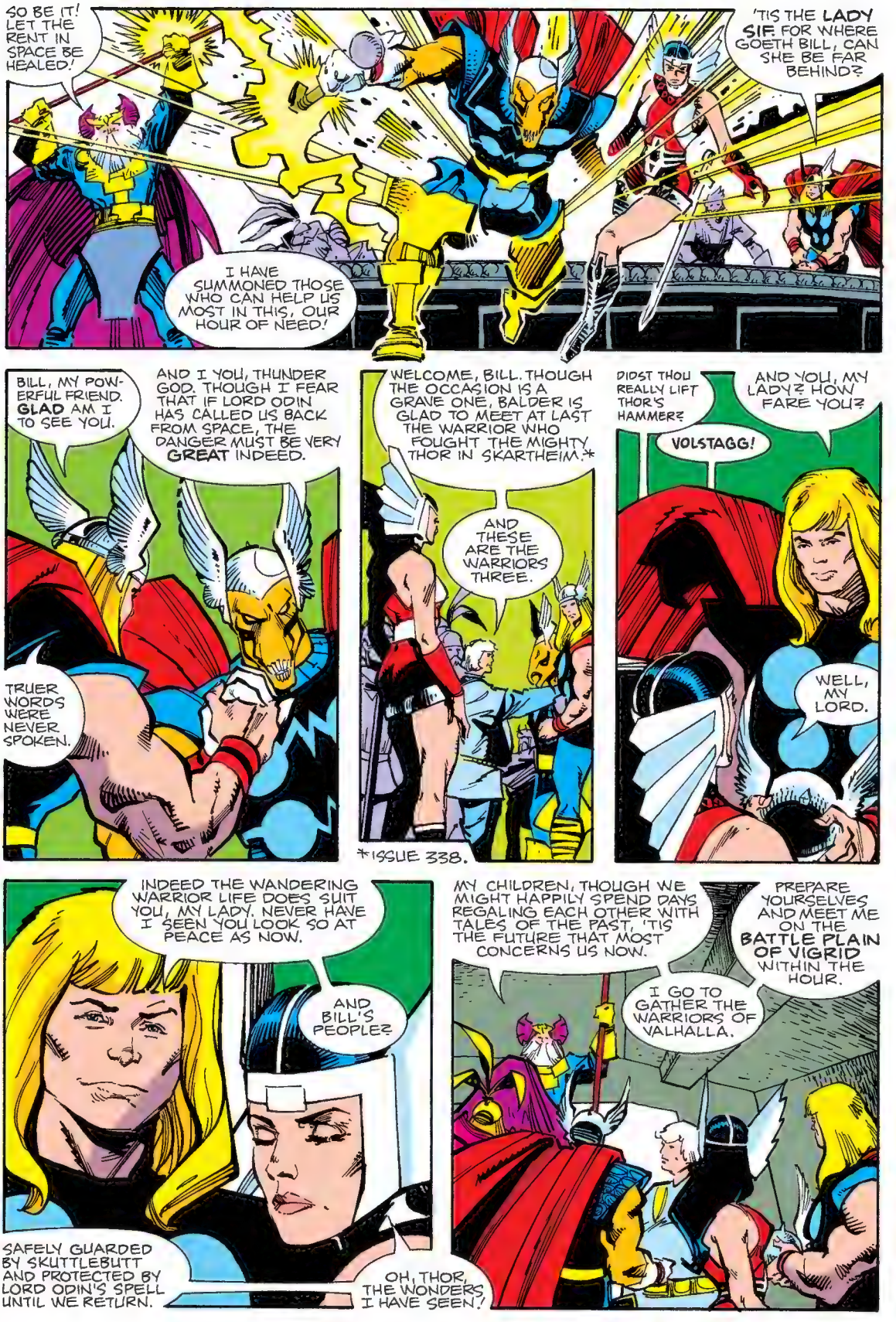
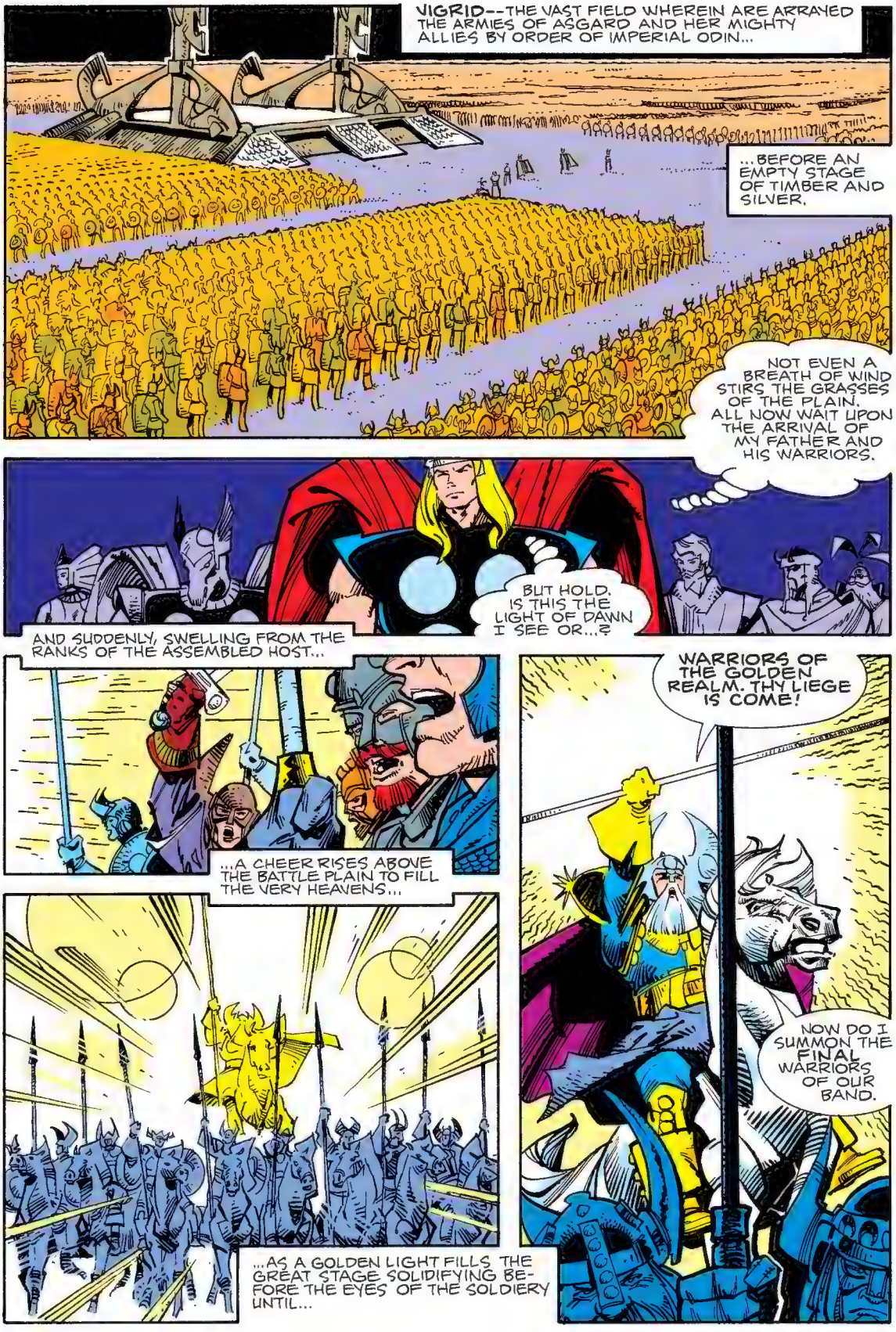
STAN LEE PRESENTS: the MIGHTY THOR®

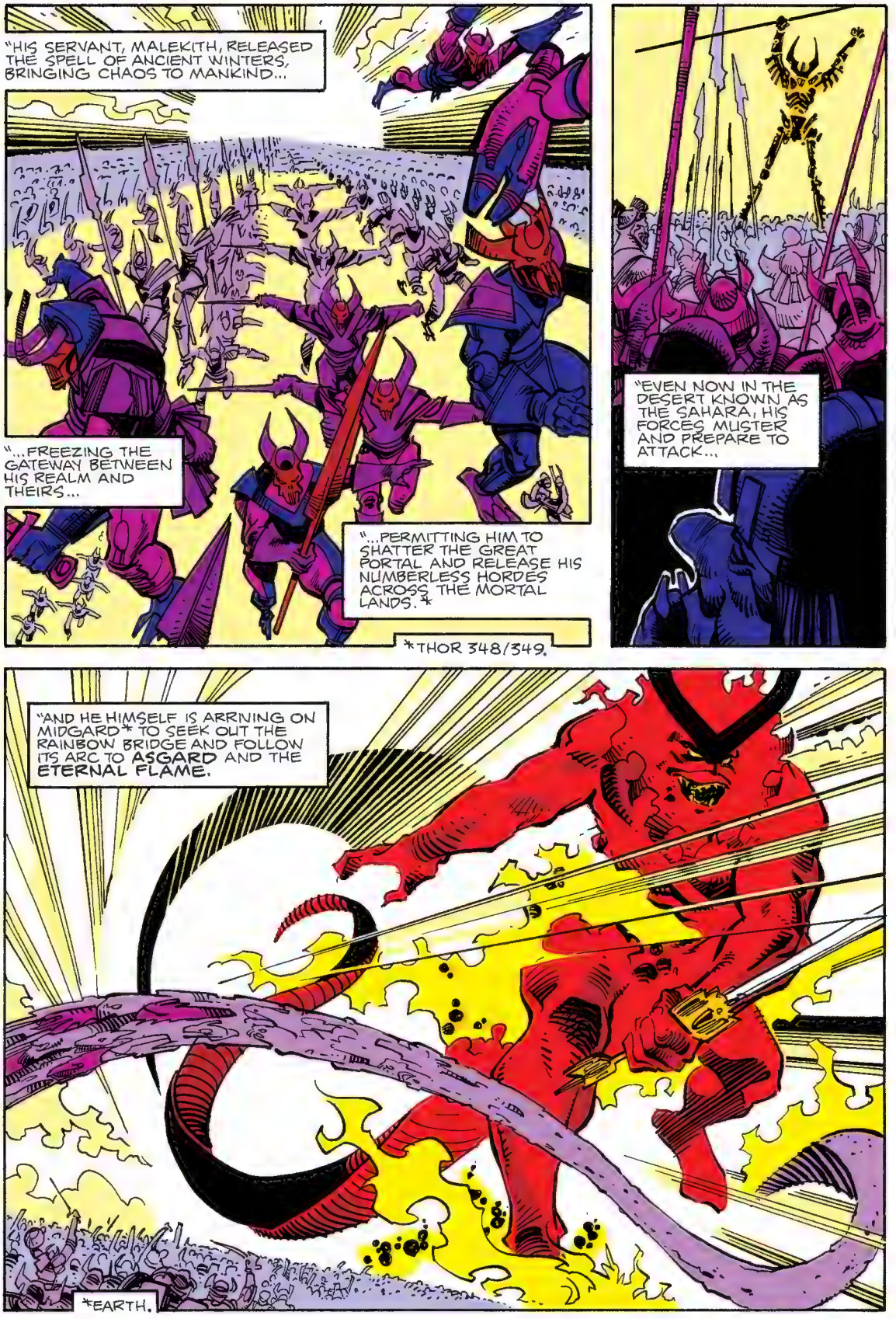
A FIERY BURST AND A FLASH OF LIGHT, A ROLLING PEEL, AND A MIGHTY BLAST OF THUNDER!
THE COSMIC AVENGER RIDES AGAIN!
AS INTO THE REALM OF ASGARD STEPS... BETA RAY BILL!...
...SUMMONED BY THE ALL-FATHER, ODIN, HIMSELF!
RAGNAROK E ROLL!
WITHIN THE CRACKLING FIELD OF ENERGY, A SECOND FIGURE DOTH EMERGE BESIDE BILL!

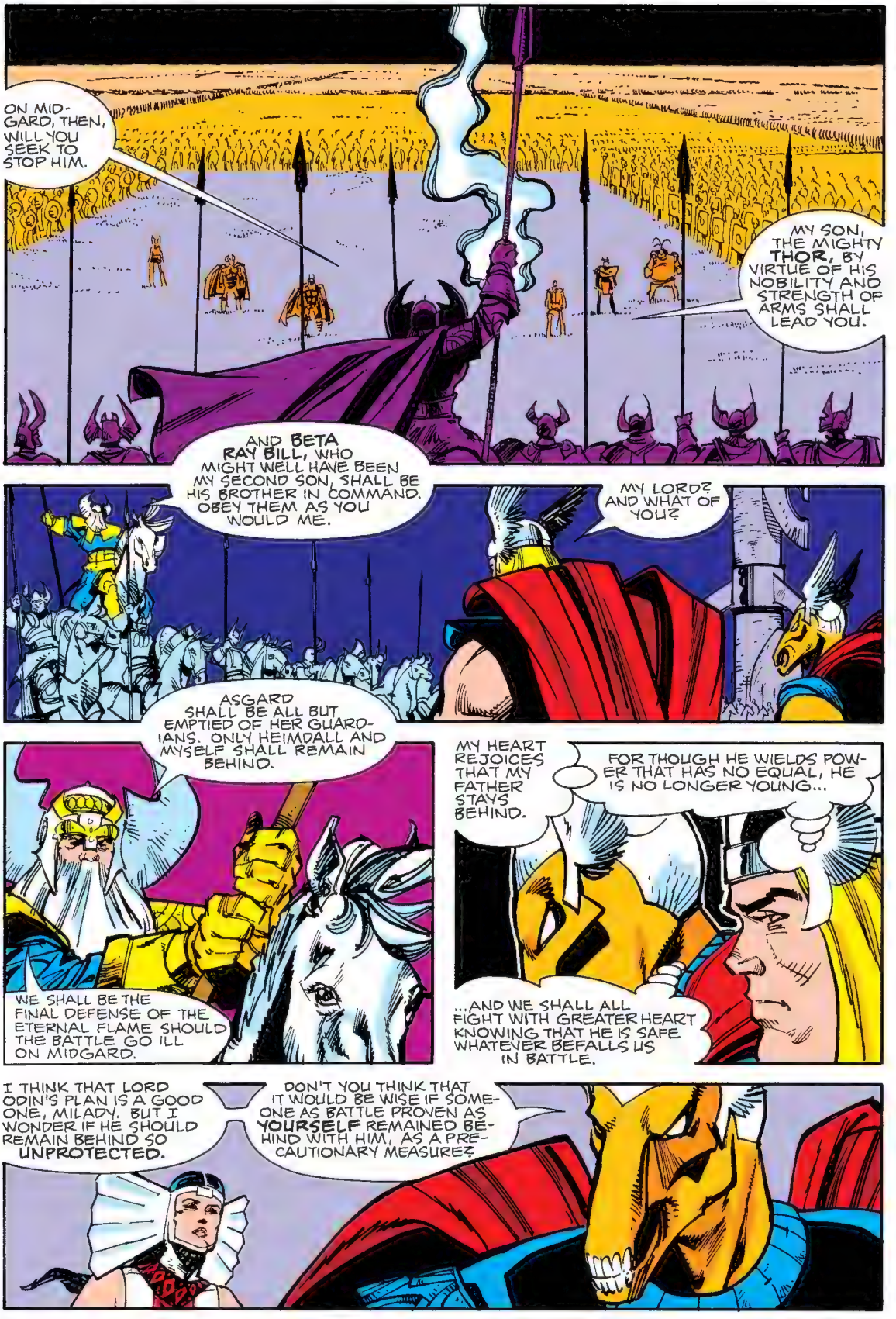
ART AND STORY: WALTER SIMONSON · LETTERING: JOHN WORKMAN, JR. · COLORS: CHRISTIE SCHEELE
EDITING: MARK GRUENWALD · EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: JIM SHOOTER

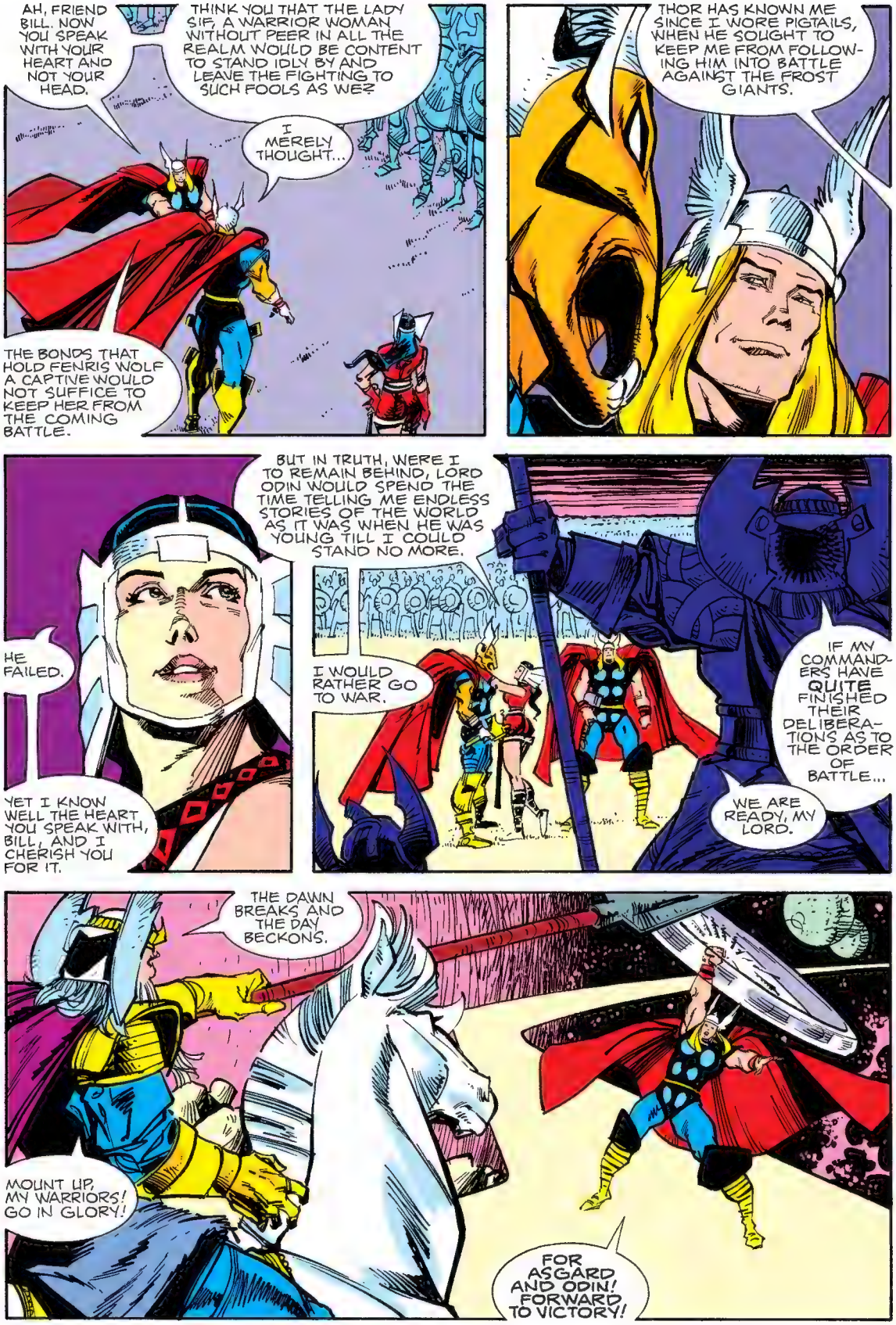

SO BE IT! LET THE RENT IN SPACE BE HEALED!
'TIS THE LADY SIF. FOR WHERE GOETH BILL, CAN SHE BE FAR BEHIND?
I HAVE SUMMONED THOSE WHO CAN HELP US MOST IN THIS, OUR HOUR OF NEED!
BILL, MY POWERFUL FRIEND. GLAD AM I TO SEE YOU.
AND I YOU, THUNDER GOD. THOUGH I FEAR THAT IF LORD ODIN HAS CALLED US BACK FROM SPACE, THE DANGER MUST BE VERY GREAT INDEED.
TRUER WORDS WERE NEVER SPOKEN.
WELCOME, BILL. THOUGH THE OCCASION IS A GRAVE ONE, BALDER IS GLAD TO MEET AT LAST THE WARRIOR WHO FOUGHT THE MIGHTY THOR IN SKARTHEIM.*
AND THESE ARE THE WARRIORS THREE.
*ISSUE 338.
DIDST THOU REALLY LIFT THOR'S HAMMER?
AND YOU, MY LADY? HOW FARE YOU?
VOLSTAGG!
WELL, MY LORD.
INDEED THE WANDERING WARRIOR LIFE DOES SUIT YOU, MY LADY. NEVER HAVE I SEEN YOU LOOK SO AT PEACE AS NOW.
AND BILL'S PEOPLE?
SAFELY GUARDED BY SKUTTLEBUTT AND PROTECTED BY LORD ODIN'S SPELL UNTIL WE RETURN.
OH, THOR, THE WONDERS I HAVE SEEN!
MY CHILDREN, THOUGH WE MIGHT HAPPILY SPEND DAYS REGALING EACH OTHER WITH TALES OF THE PAST, 'TIS THE FUTURE THAT MOST CONCERNS US NOW.
I GO TO GATHER THE WARRIORS OF VALHALLA.
PREPARE YOURSELVES AND MEET ME ON THE BATTLE PLAIN OF VIGRID WITHIN THE HOUR.

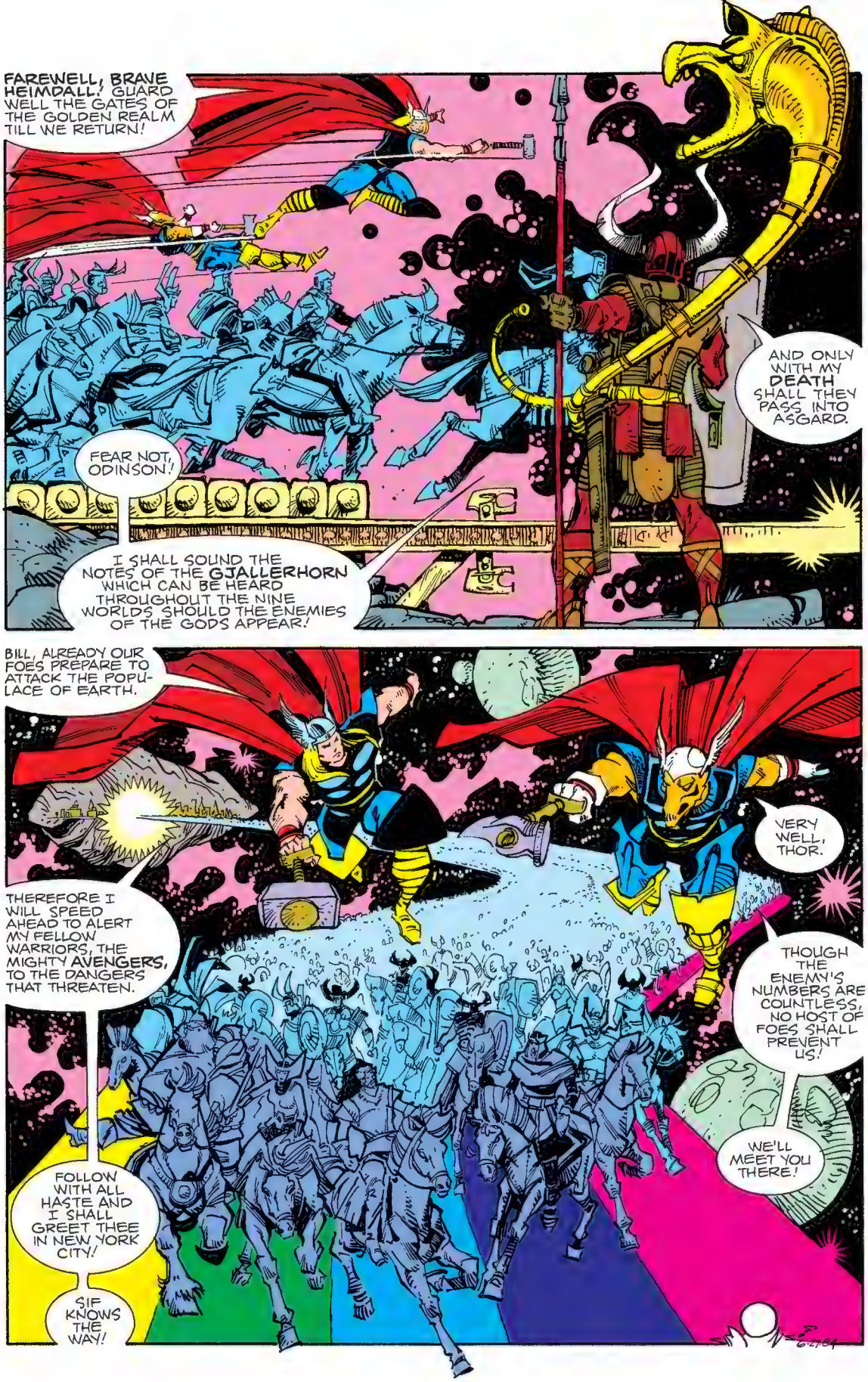

VIGRID--THE VAST FIELD WHEREIN ARE ARRAYED THE ARMIES OF ASGARD AND HER MIGHTY ALLIES BY ORDER OF IMPERIAL ODIN...
...BEFORE AN EMPTY STAGE OF TIMBER AND SILVER.
NOT EVEN A BREATH OF WIND STIRS THE GRASSES OF THE PLAIN. ALL NOW WAIT UPON THE ARRIVAL OF MY FATHER AND HIS WARRIORS.
BUT HOLD. IS THIS THE LIGHT OF DAWN I SEE OR...?
AND SUDDENLY, SWELLING FROM THE RANKS OF THE ASSEMBLED HOST...
...A CHEER RISES ABOVE THE BATTLE PLAIN TO FILL THE VERY HEAVENS...
WARRIORS OF THE GOLDEN REALM. THY LIEGE IS COME!
NOW DO I SUMMON THE FINAL WARRIORS OF OUR BAND.
...AS A GOLDEN LIGHT FILLS THE GREAT STAGE SOLIDIFYING BEFORE THE EYES OF THE SOLDIERY UNTIL...

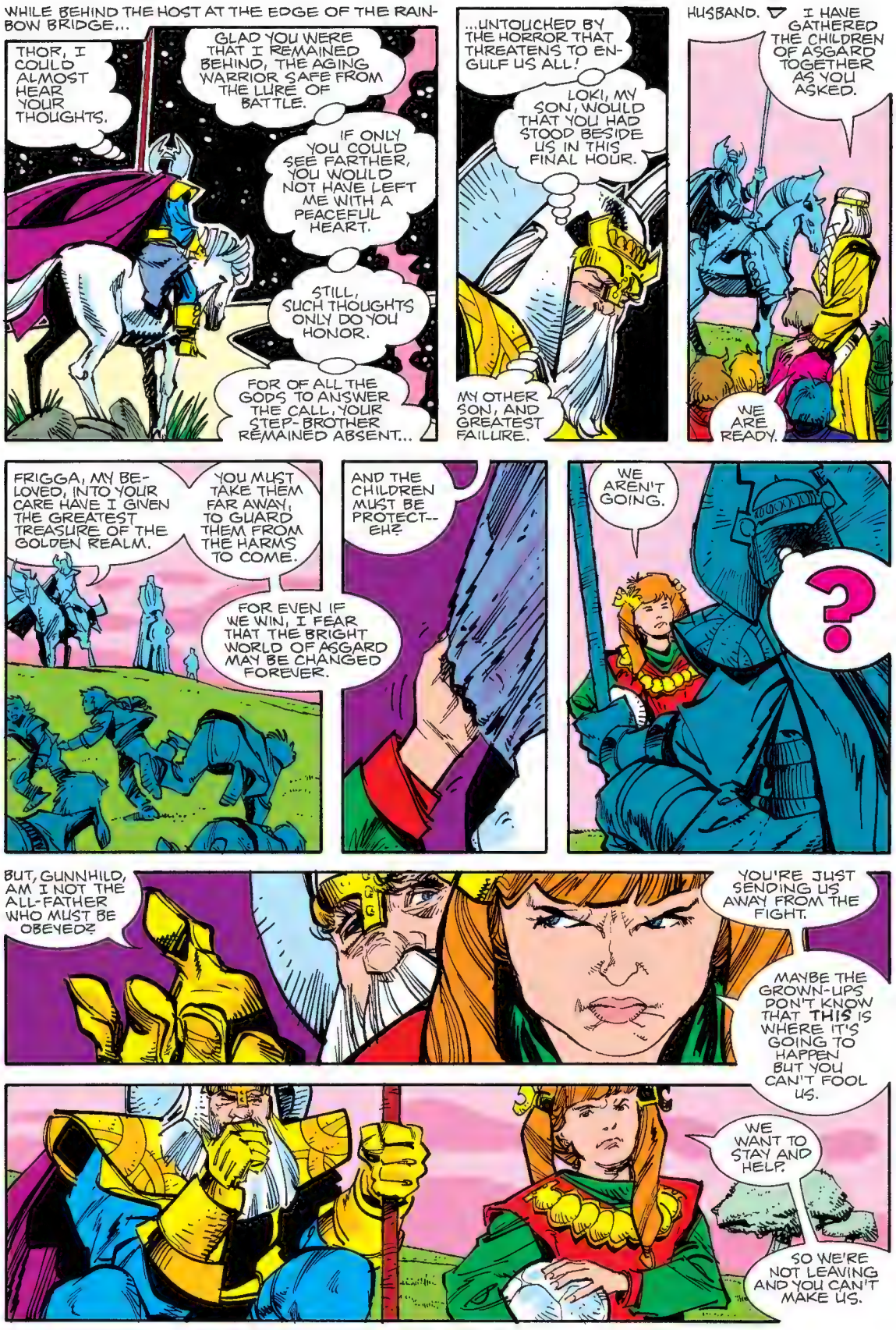
...THE GODS AND GODDESSES WHO WILL STAND WITH ASGARD IN THIS LAST DAWN AGAINST ALL THE FORCES OF FIRE AND DARKNESS BEFORE US!
LET THOSE WHO SIDE WITH THE LIGHT APPEAR.
WE HAVE COME, LORD ODIN.
THOUGH IN THE PAST WE HAVE CLUNG TO THE SHADOWS, THE COMING DARKNESS THREATENS TO DESTROY US ALL.
WE STAND WITH ASGARD.
I AM PLEASED.
BUT NOT ALL HAVE ANSWERED THE CALL, I SEE. UPON THEIR OWN HEADS SHALL THE FUTURE FALL MOST HEAVILY.
WARRIORS OF THE GOLDEN REALM! HEED MY WORDS!
FOR I WOULD TELL YOU THE STORY OF OUR FOE.
HE IS SURTUR FROM THE LAND OF MUSPELHEIM, THE OLDEST OF ALL WHO LIVE!
AND THE ENEMY OF ALL WHO CHERISH LIVING!
HE HAS FORGED A GREAT SWORD!
NOW HE SEEKS THE PATH TO ASGARD TO REACH THE ETERNAL FLAME KEPT WITHIN THE WALLS OF THE GOLDEN CITY.
FOR IF HE CAN IGNITE HIS SWORD THEREIN, NOTHING WILL BE ABLE TO PREVENT HIM FROM SETTING ALL THE NINE WORLDS TO THE TORCH...
...AND DESTROYING THE UNIVERSE ITSELF!
TO THIS END HAS HE BENT ALL HIS WILL AND POWER!

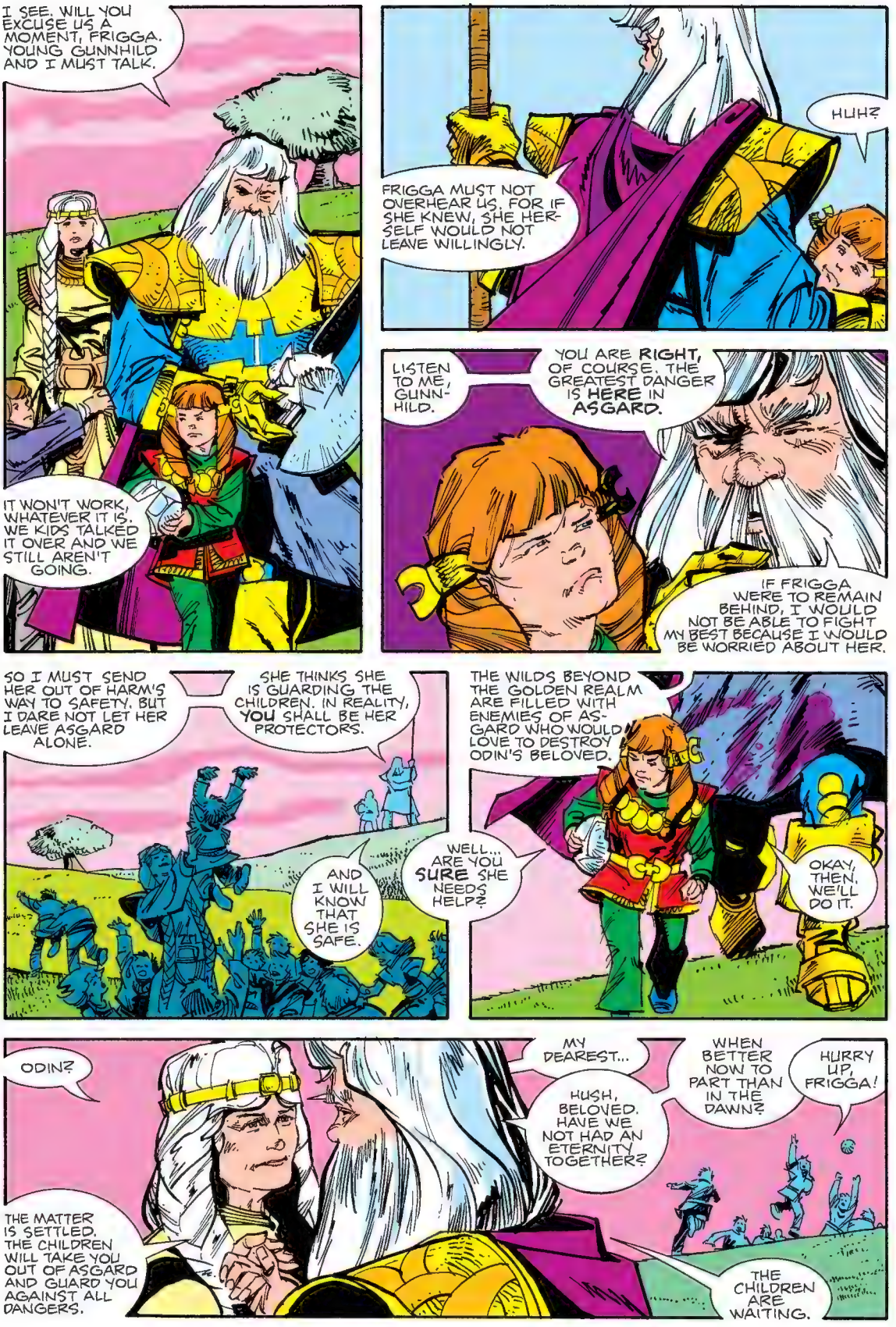

"HIS SERVANT, MALEKITH, RELEASED THE SPELL OF ANCIENT WINTERS, BRINGING CHAOS TO MANKIND...
"...FREEZING THE GATEWAY BETWEEN HIS REALM AND THEIRS...
"...PERMITTING HIM TO SHATTER THE GREAT PORTAL AND RELEASE HIS NUMBERLESS HORDES ACROSS THE MORTAL LANDS.*
*THOR 348/349.
"EVEN NOW IN THE DESERT KNOWN AS THE SAHARA, HIS FORCES MUSTER AND PREPARE TO ATTACK...
"AND HE HIMSELF IS ARRIVING ON MIDGARD* TO SEEK OUT THE RAINBOW BRIDGE AND FOLLOW ITS ARC TO ASGARD AND THE ETERNAL FLAME.
*EARTH.

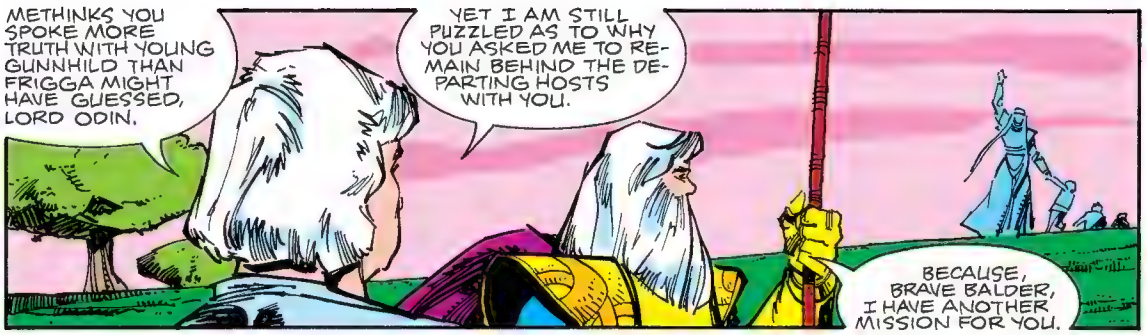

ON MIDGARD, THEN, WILL YOU SEEK TO STOP HIM.
MY SON, THE MIGHTY THOR, BY VIRTUE OF HIS NOBILITY AND STRENGTH OF ARMS SHALL LEAD YOU.
AND BETA RAY BILL, WHO MIGHT WELL HAVE BEEN MY SECOND SON, SHALL BE HIS BROTHER IN COMMAND. OBEY THEM AS YOU WOULD ME.
MY LORD? AND WHAT OF YOU?
ASGARD SHALL BE ALL BUT EMPTIED OF HER GUARDIANS. ONLY HEIMDALL AND MYSELF SHALL REMAIN BEHIND.
WE SHALL BE THE FINAL DEFENSE OF THE ETERNAL FLAME SHOULD THE BATTLE GO ILL ON MIDGARD.
MY HEART REJOICES THAT MY FATHER STAYS BEHIND.
FOR THOUGH HE WIELDS POWER THAT HAS NO EQUAL, HE IS NO LONGER YOUNG...
...AND WE SHALL ALL FIGHT WITH GREATER HEART KNOWING THAT HE IS SAFE WHATEVER BEFALLS US IN BATTLE.
I THINK THAT LORD ODIN'S PLAN IS A GOOD ONE, MILADY. BUT I WONDER IF HE SHOULD REMAIN BEHIND SO UNPROTECTED.
DON'T YOU THINK THAT IT WOULD BE WISE IF SOMEONE AS BATTLE PROVEN AS YOURSELF REMAINED BEHIND WITH HIM, AS A PRECAUTIONARY MEASURE?

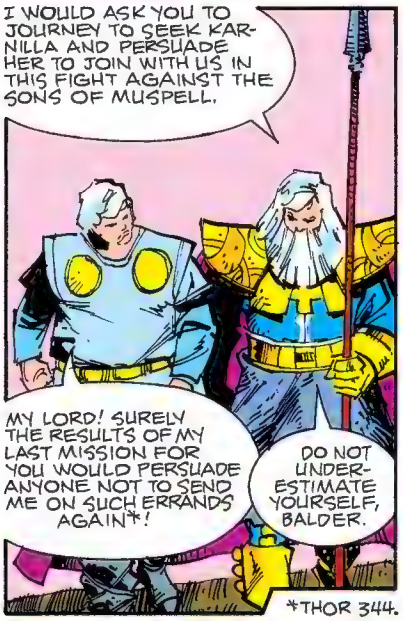

AH, FRIEND BILL. NOW YOU SPEAK WITH YOUR HEART AND NOT YOUR HEAD.
THINK YOU THAT THE LADY SIF, A WARRIOR WOMAN WITHOUT PEER IN ALL THE REALM WOULD BE CONTENT TO STAND IDLY BY AND LEAVE THE FIGHTING TO SUCH FOOLS AS WE?
I MERELY THOUGHT...
THE BONDS THAT HOLD FENRIS WOLF A CAPTIVE WOULD NOT SUFFICE TO KEEP HER FROM THE COMING BATTLE.
THOR HAS KNOWN ME SINCE I WORE PIGTAILS, WHEN HE SOUGHT TO KEEP ME FROM FOLLOWING HIM INTO BATTLE AGAINST THE FROST GIANTS.
HE FAILED.
YET I KNOW WELL THE HEART YOU SPEAK WITH, BILL, AND I CHERISH YOU FOR IT.
BUT IN TRUTH, WERE I TO REMAIN BEHIND, LORD ODIN WOULD SPEND THE TIME TELLING ME ENDLESS STORIES OF THE WORLD AS IT WAS WHEN HE WAS YOUNG TILL I COULD STAND NO MORE.
I WOULD RATHER GO TO WAR.
IF MY COMMANDERS HAVE QUITE FINISHED THEIR DELIBERATIONS AS TO THE ORDER OF BATTLE...
WE ARE READY, MY LORD.
THE DAWN BREAKS AND THE DAY BECKONS.
MOUNT UP, MY WARRIORS! GO IN GLORY!
FOR ASGARD AND ODIN! FORWARD TO VICTORY!


FAREWELL, BRAVE HEIMDALL! GUARD WELL THE GATES OF THE GOLDEN REALM TILL WE RETURN!
AND ONLY WITH MY DEATH SHALL THEY PASS INTO ASGARD.
FEAR NOT, ODINSON!
I SHALL SOUND THE NOTES OF THE GJALLERHORN WHICH CAN BE HEARD THROUGHOUT THE NINE WORLDS SHOULD THE ENEMIES OF THE GODS APPEAR!
BILL, ALREADY OUR FOES PREPARE TO ATTACK THE POPULACE OF EARTH.
VERY WELL, THOR.
THEREFORE I WILL SPEED AHEAD TO ALERT MY FELLOW WARRIORS, THE MIGHTY AVENGERS, TO THE DANGERS THAT THREATEN.
THOUGH THE ENEMY'S NUMBERS ARE COUNTLESS, NO HOST OF FOES SHALL PREVENT US!
WE'LL MEET YOU THERE!
FOLLOW WITH ALL HASTE AND I SHALL GREET THEE IN NEW YORK CITY!
SIF KNOWS THE WAY!


WHILE BEHIND THE HOST AT THE EDGE OF THE RAINBOW BRIDGE...
THOR, I COULD ALMOST HEAR YOUR THOUGHTS.
GLAD YOU WERE THAT I REMAINED BEHIND, THE AGING WARRIOR SAFE FROM THE LURE OF BATTLE.
IF ONLY YOU COULD SEE FARTHER, YOU WOULD NOT HAVE LEFT ME WITH A PEACEFUL HEART.
STILL, SUCH THOUGHTS ONLY DO YOU HONOR.
FOR OF ALL THE GODS TO ANSWER THE CALL, YOUR STEP-BROTHER REMAINED ABSENT...
...UNTOUCHED BY THE HORROR THAT THREATENS TO ENGULF US ALL!
LOKI, MY SON, WOULD THAT YOU HAD STOOD BESIDE US IN THIS FINAL HOUR.
MY OTHER SON, AND GREATEST FAILURE.
HUSBAND. I HAVE GATHERED THE CHILDREN OF ASGARD TOGETHER AS YOU ASKED.
WE ARE READY.
FRIGGA, MY BELOVED, INTO YOUR CARE HAVE I GIVEN THE GREATEST TREASURE OF THE GOLDEN REALM.
YOU MUST TAKE THEM FAR AWAY, TO GUARD THEM FROM THE HARMS TO COME.
FOR EVEN IF WE WIN, I FEAR THAT THE BRIGHT WORLD OF ASGARD MAY BE CHANGED FOREVER.
AND THE CHILDREN MUST BE PROTECT-- EH?
WE AREN'T GOING.
?
BUT, GUNNHILD, AM I NOT THE ALL-FATHER WHO MUST BE OBEYED?
YOU'RE JUST SENDING US AWAY FROM THE FIGHT.
MAYBE THE GROWN-UPS DON'T KNOW THAT THIS IS WHERE IT'S GOING TO HAPPEN BUT YOU CAN'T FOOL US.
WE WANT TO STAY AND HELP.
SO WE'RE NOT LEAVING AND YOU CAN'T MAKE US.

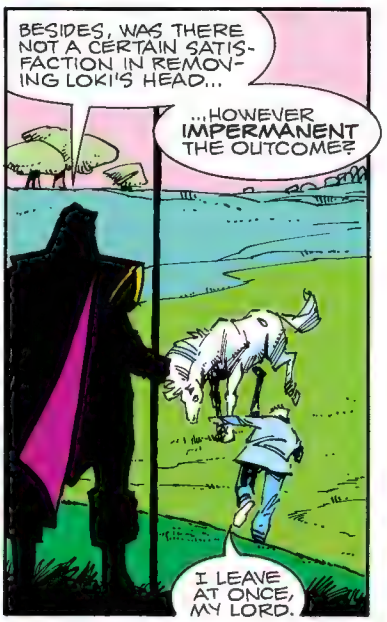

I SEE. WILL YOU EXCUSE US A MOMENT, FRIGGA. YOUNG GUNNHILD AND I MUST TALK.
IT WON'T WORK, WHATEVER IT IS. WE KIDS TALKED IT OVER AND WE STILL AREN'T GOING.
HUH?
FRIGGA MUST NOT OVERHEAR US, FOR IF SHE KNEW, SHE HERSELF WOULD NOT LEAVE WILLINGLY.
LISTEN TO ME, GUNNHILD.
YOU ARE RIGHT, OF COURSE. THE GREATEST DANGER IS HERE IN ASGARD.
IF FRIGGA WERE TO REMAIN BEHIND, I WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO FIGHT MY BEST BECAUSE I WOULD BE WORRIED ABOUT HER.
SO I MUST SEND HER OUT OF HARM'S WAY TO SAFETY. BUT I DARE NOT LET HER LEAVE ASGARD ALONE.
SHE THINKS SHE IS GUARDING THE CHILDREN. IN REALITY, YOU SHALL BE HER PROTECTORS.
AND I WILL KNOW THAT SHE IS SAFE.
WELL... ARE YOU SURE SHE NEEDS HELP?
THE WILDS BEYOND THE GOLDEN REALM ARE FILLED WITH ENEMIES OF ASGARD WHO WOULD LOVE TO DESTROY ODIN'S BELOVED.
OKAY, THEN. WE'LL DO IT.
ODIN?
THE MATTER IS SETTLED. THE CHILDREN WILL TAKE YOU OUT OF ASGARD AND GUARD YOU AGAINST ALL DANGERS.
MY DEAREST...
HUSH, BELOVED. HAVE WE NOT HAD AN ETERNITY TOGETHER?
WHEN BETTER NOW TO PART THAN IN THE DAWN?
HURRY UP, FRIGGA!
THE CHILDREN ARE WAITING.


METHINKS YOU SPOKE MORE TRUTH WITH YOUNG GUNNHILD THAN FRIGGA MIGHT HAVE GUESSED, LORD ODIN.
YET I AM STILL PUZZLED AS TO WHY YOU ASKED ME TO REMAIN BEHIND THE DEPARTING HOSTS WITH YOU.
BECAUSE, BRAVE BALDER, I HAVE ANOTHER MISSION FOR YOU.

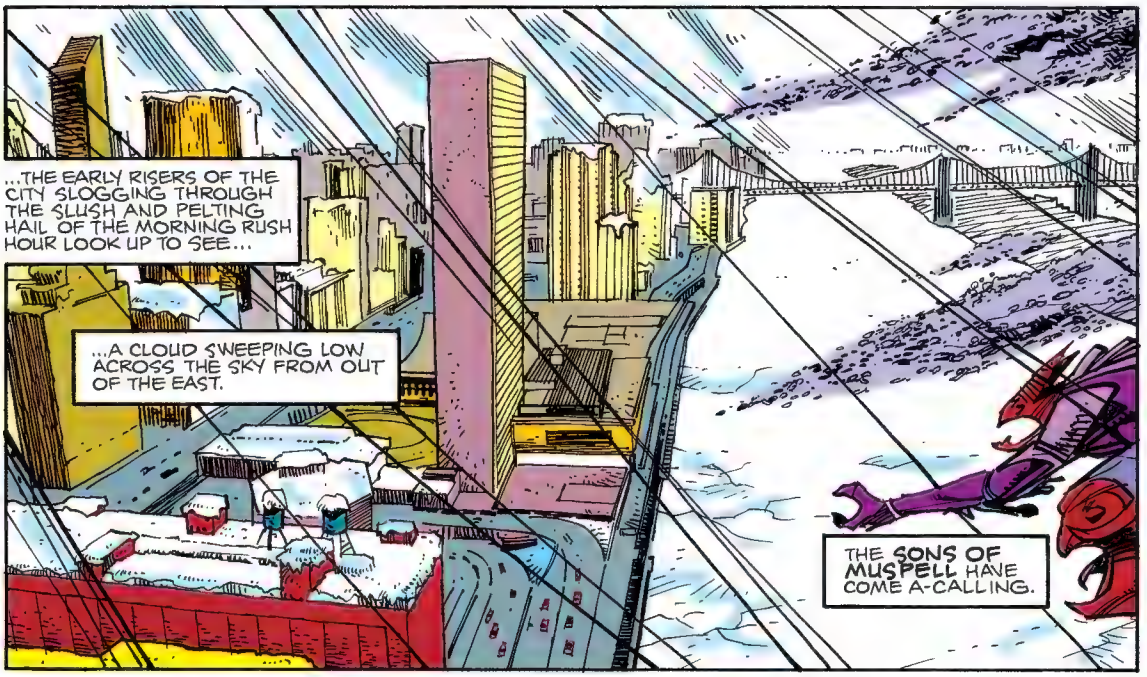

I WOULD ASK YOU TO JOURNEY TO SEEK KARNILLA AND PERSUADE HER TO JOIN WITH US IN THIS FIGHT AGAINST THE SONS OF MUSPELL.
MY LORD! SURELY THE RESULTS OF MY LAST MISSION FOR YOU WOULD PERSUADE ANYONE NOT TO SEND ME ON SUCH ERRANDS AGAIN*!
DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE YOURSELF, BALDER.

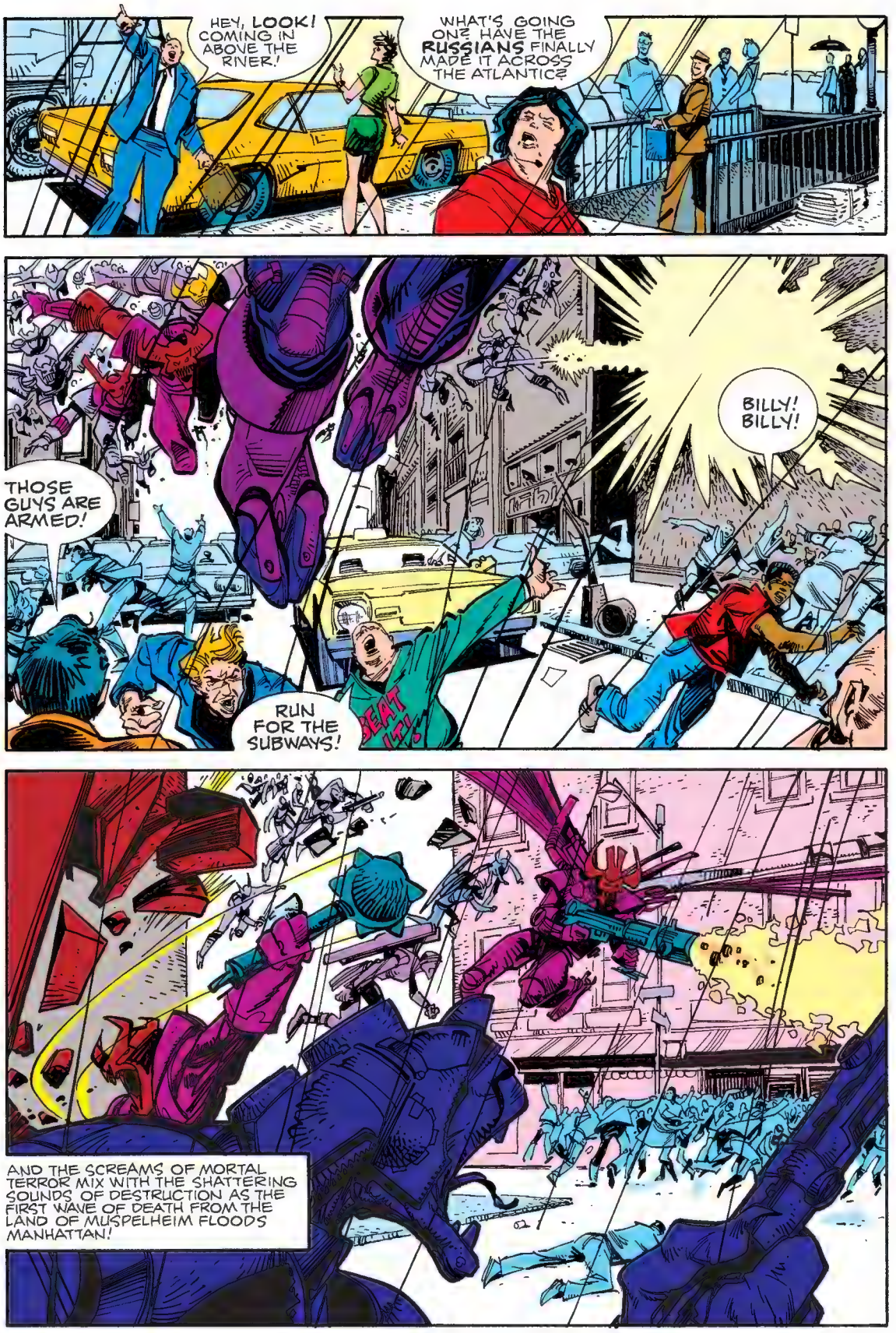
*THOR 344.

THE GOD KARNILLA KNEW IS NOT THE GOD TO WHOM THE NORNS HAVE SHOWN THE TAPESTRY OF LIFE.
AND THE FINAL RESULTS OF YOUR FIRST MISSIONS ARE NOT YET IN.

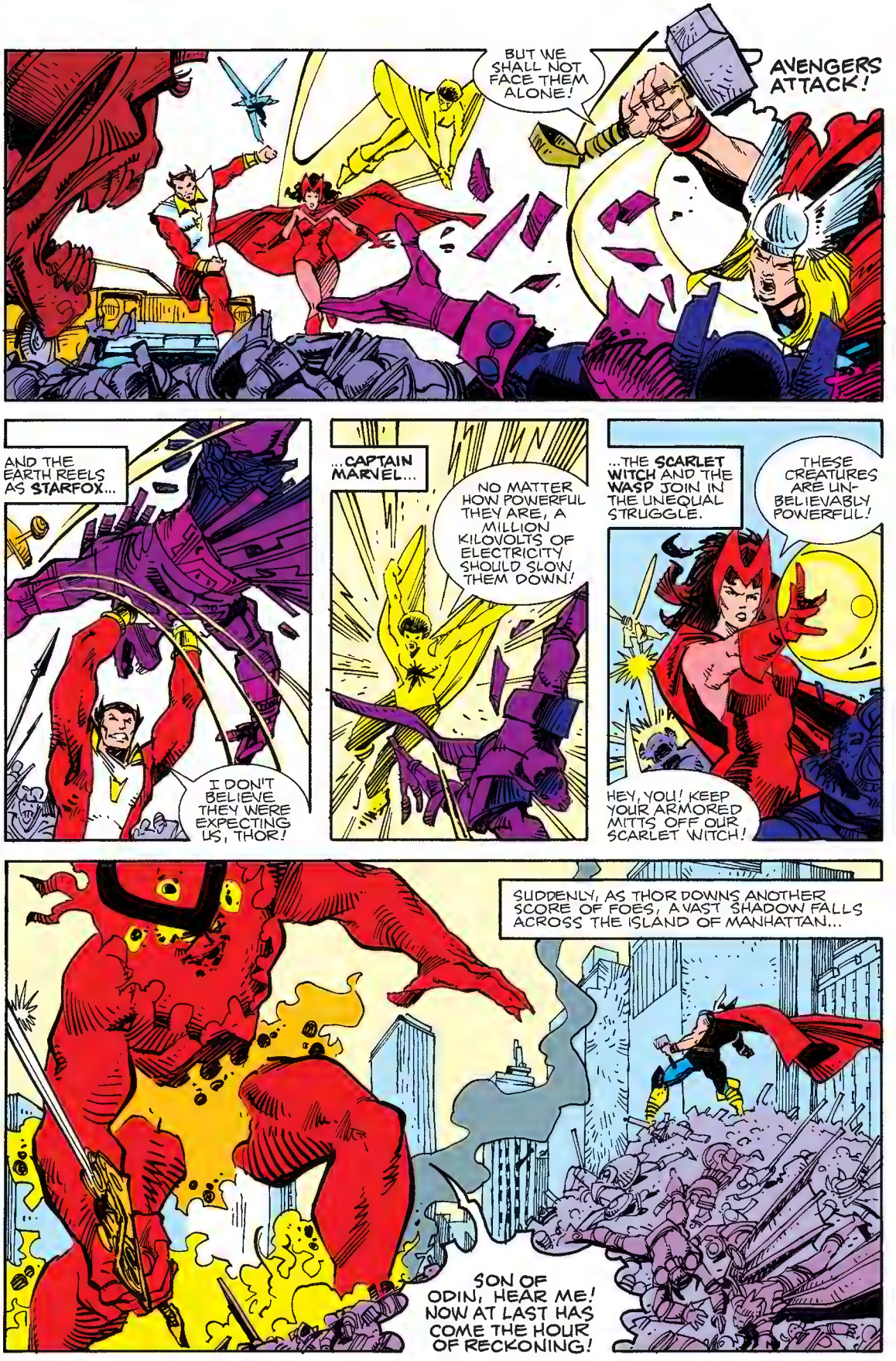

BESIDES, WAS THERE NOT A CERTAIN SATISFACTION IN REMOVING LOKI'S HEAD...
...HOWEVER IMPERMANENT THE OUTCOME?
I LEAVE AT ONCE, MY LORD.

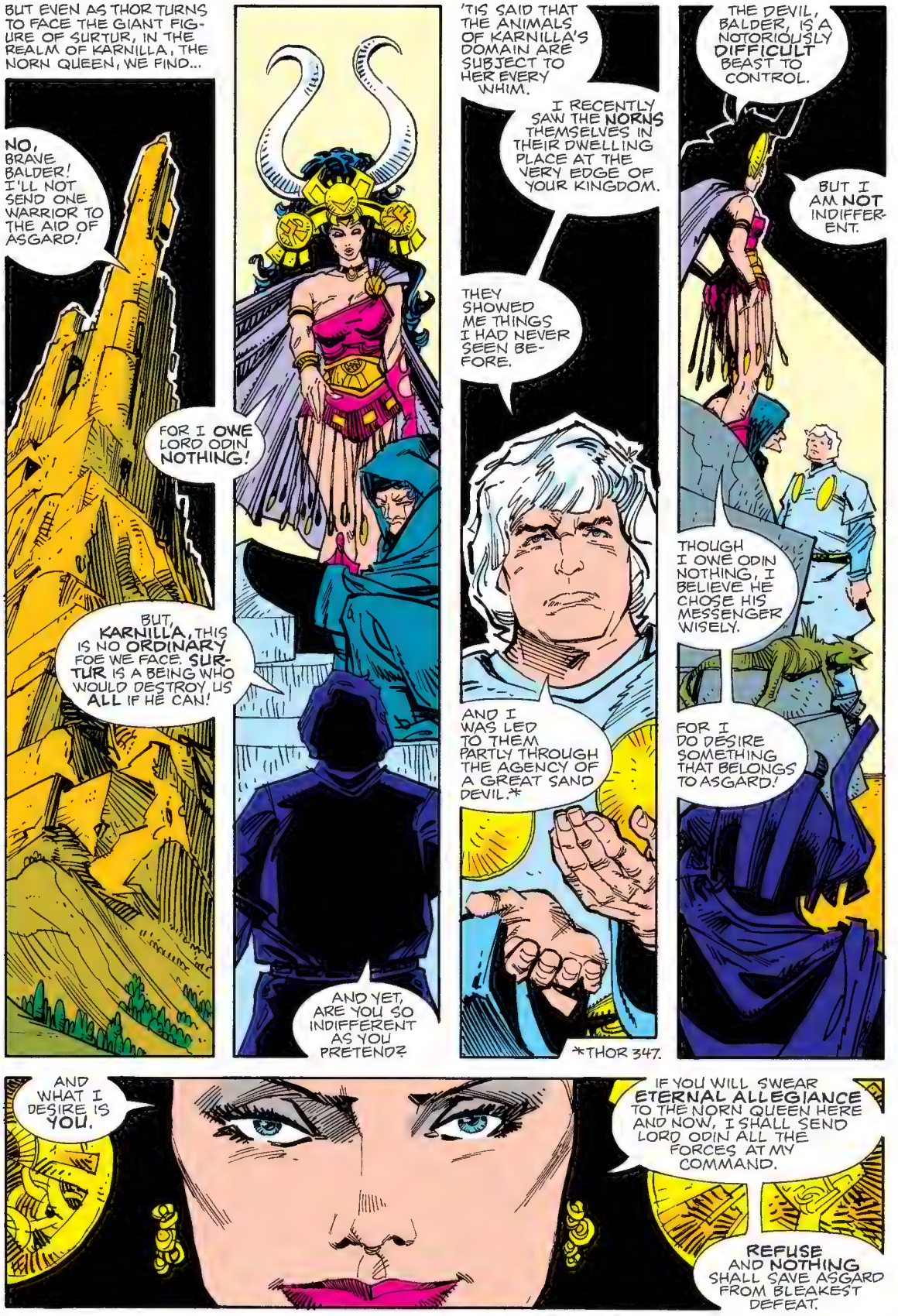
MEANWHILE, IN NEW YORK CITY, WHERE THE DAWN'S SUMMER LIGHT IS PRACTICALLY OBLITERATED BY THE WINTER STORM THAT SWEEPS ACROSS THE GLOBE FROM POLE TO POLE...


...THE EARLY RISERS OF THE CITY SLOGGING THROUGH THE SLUSH AND PELTING HAIL OF THE MORNING RUSH HOUR LOOK UP TO SEE...
...A CLOUD SWEEPING LOW ACROSS THE SKY FROM OUT OF THE EAST.
THE SONS OF MUSPELL HAVE COME A-CALLING.

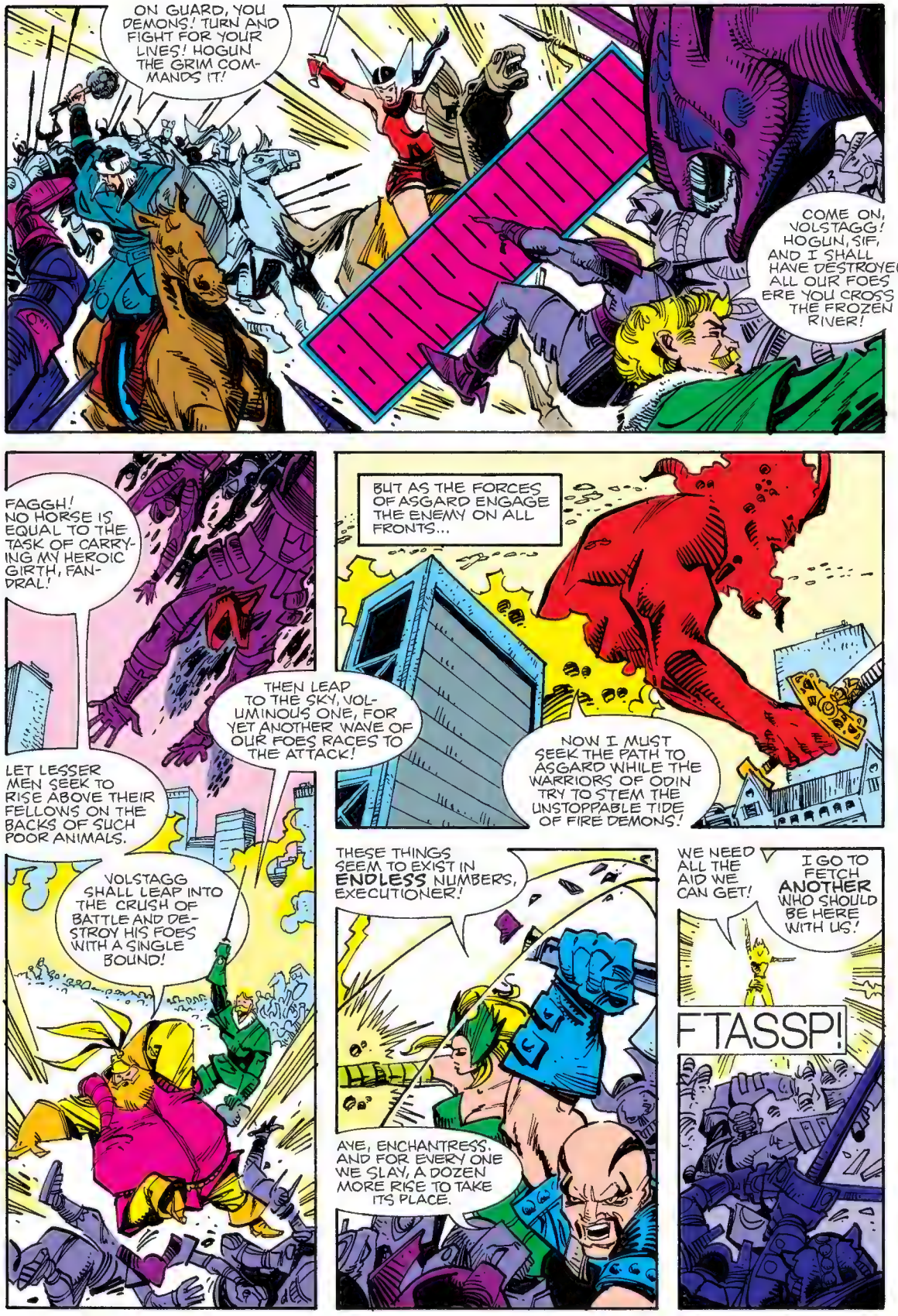

HEY, LOOK! COMING IN ABOVE THE RIVER!
WHAT'S GOING ON? HAVE THE RUSSIANS FINALLY MADE IT ACROSS THE ATLANTIC?
THOSE GUYS ARE ARMED!
BILLY! BILLY!
RUN FOR THE SUBWAYS!
BEAT IT!
AND THE SCREAMS OF MORTAL TERROR MIX WITH THE SHATTERING SOUNDS OF DESTRUCTION AS THE FIRST WAVE OF DEATH FROM THE LAND OF MUSPELHEIM FLOODS MANHATTAN!

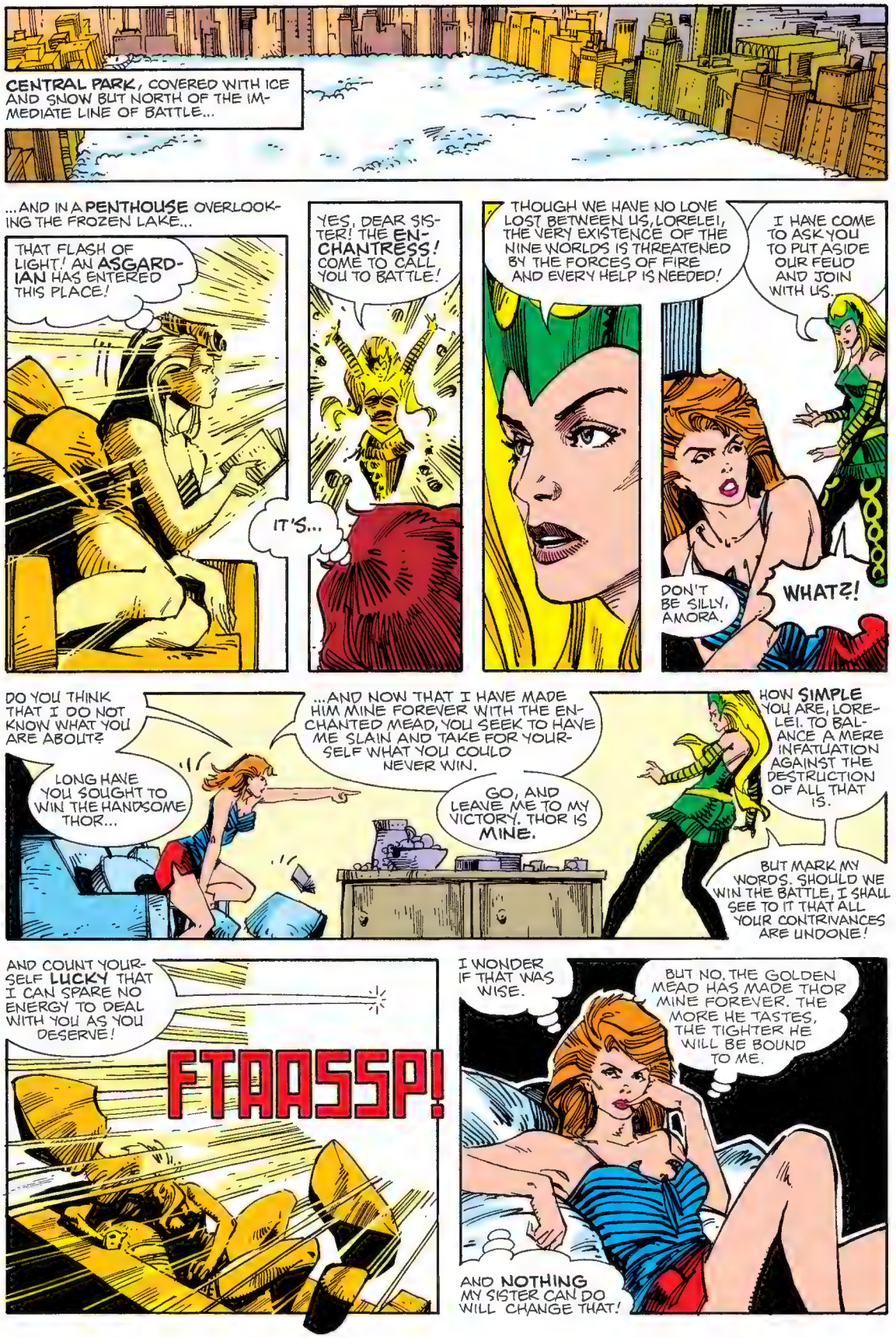
THOUGH A FEW TRY VALIANTLY TO STEM THE TIDE, THE DEMON HORDES OF SURTUR SWEEP ALL OPPOSITION BEFORE THEM.
NOW, BROTHERS, THE WORLD OF MEN SHALL TREMBLE BEFORE THE DEVASTATING POWER OF THE SONS OF MUSPELL!
WRECK AND RUIN! DESTRUCTION TO THE WORLD!
LET NO ONE SURVIVE!
WHEN SUDDENLY...
BRAKKA WHOOM!
TO MY HAND, FAITHFUL MJOLNIR!
THOUGH YOUR MIGHT HAS DROPPED A SCORE OF MUSPELL'S SONS, THERE BE YET MORE WHICH MUST BE STOPPED!

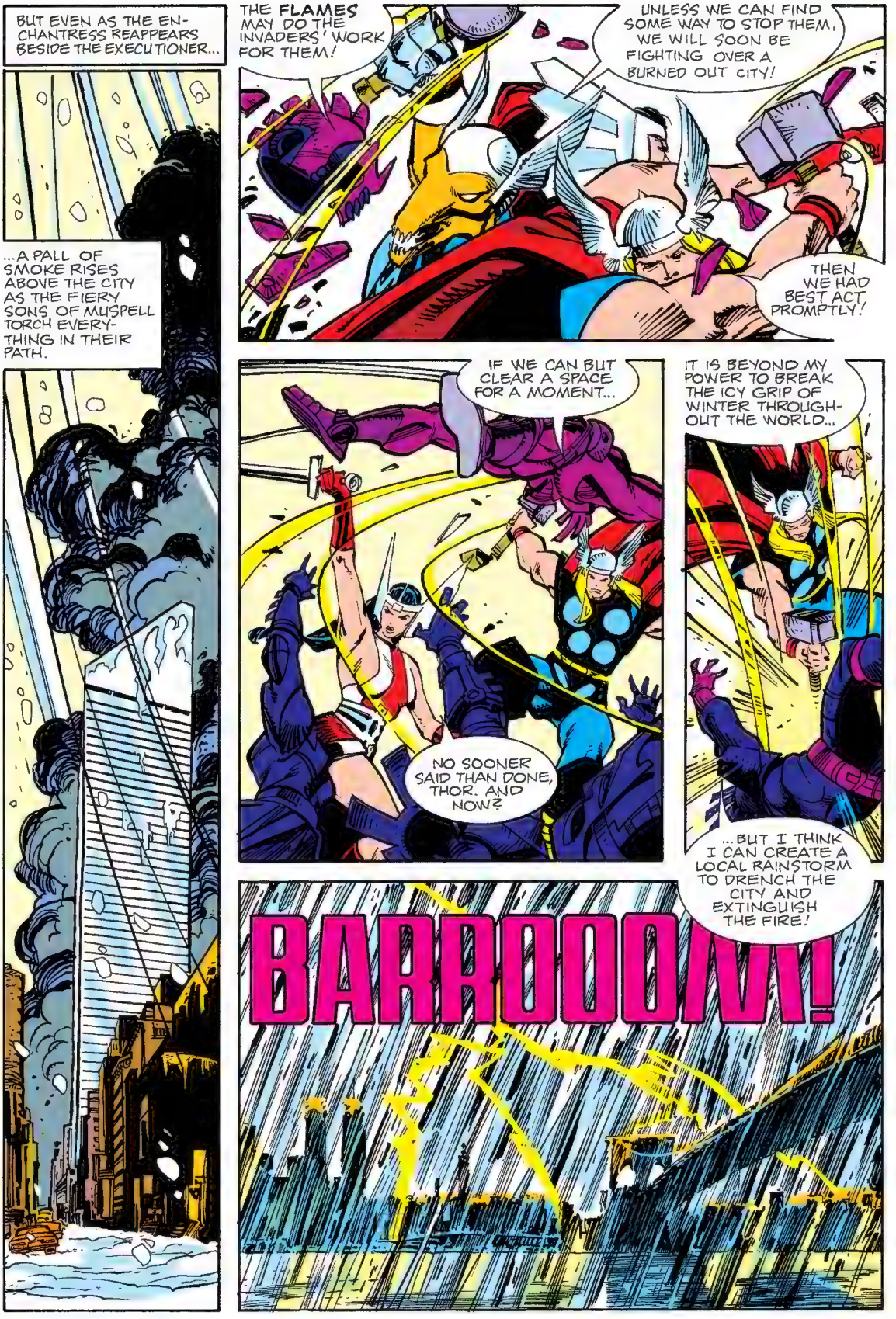

BUT WE SHALL NOT FACE THEM ALONE!
AVENGERS ATTACK!
AND THE EARTH REELS AS STARFOX...
I DON'T BELIEVE THEY WERE EXPECTING US, THOR!
...CAPTAIN MARVEL...
NO MATTER HOW POWERFUL THEY ARE, A MILLION KILOVOLTS OF ELECTRICITY SHOULD SLOW THEM DOWN!
...THE SCARLET WITCH AND THE WASP JOIN IN THE UNEQUAL STRUGGLE.
THESE CREATURES ARE UN-BELIEVABLY POWERFUL!
HEY, YOU! KEEP YOUR ARMORED MITTS OFF OUR SCARLET WITCH!
SUDDENLY, AS THOR DOWNS ANOTHER SCORE OF FOES, A VAST SHADOW FALLS ACROSS THE ISLAND OF MANHATTAN...
SON OF ODIN, HEAR ME! NOW AT LAST HAS COME THE HOUR OF RECKONING!

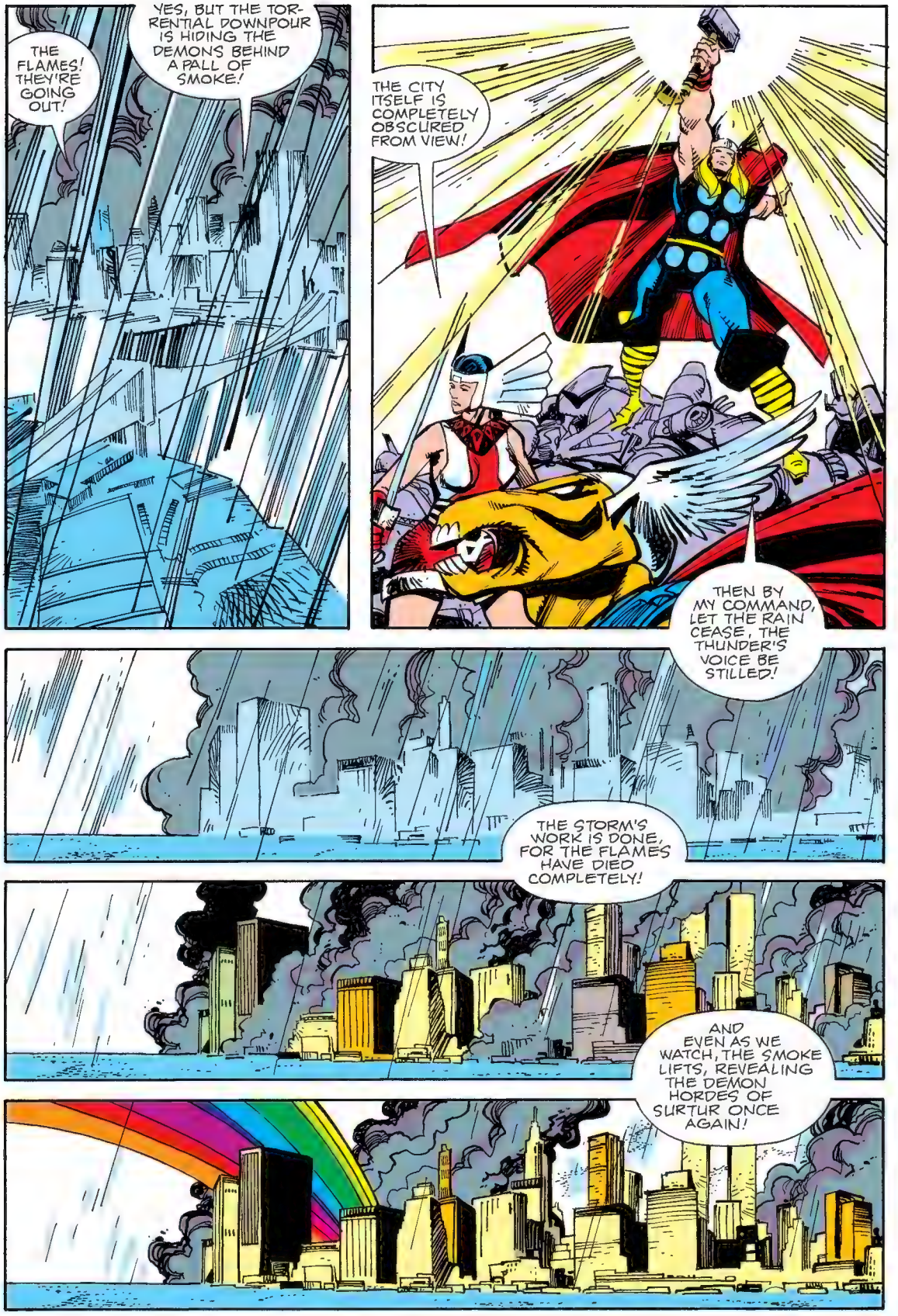

BUT EVEN AS THOR TURNS TO FACE THE GIANT FIGURE OF SURTUR, IN THE REALM OF KARNILLA, THE NORN QUEEN, WE FIND...
NO, BRAVE BALDER! I'LL NOT SEND ONE WARRIOR TO THE AID OF ASGARD!
FOR I OWE LORD ODIN NOTHING!
BUT, KARNILLA, THIS IS NO ORDINARY FOE WE FACE. SURTUR IS A BEING WHO WOULD DESTROY US ALL IF HE CAN!
AND YET, ARE YOU SO INDIFFERENT AS YOU PRETEND?
'TIS SAID THAT THE ANIMALS OF KARNILLA'S DOMAIN ARE SUBJECT TO HER EVERY WHIM.
I RECENTLY SAW THE NORNS THEMSELVES IN THEIR DWELLING PLACE AT THE VERY EDGE OF YOUR KINGDOM.
THEY SHOWED ME THINGS I HAD NEVER SEEN BEFORE.
AND I WAS LED TO THEM PARTLY THROUGH THE AGENCY OF A GREAT SAND DEVIL.*
*THOR 347.
THE DEVIL, BALDER, IS A NOTORIOUSLY DIFFICULT BEAST TO CONTROL.
BUT I AM NOT INDIFFERENT.
THOUGH I OWE ODIN NOTHING, I BELIEVE HE CHOSE HIS MESSENGER WISELY.
FOR I DO DESIRE SOMETHING THAT BELONGS TO ASGARD!
AND WHAT I DESIRE IS YOU.
IF YOU WILL SWEAR ETERNAL ALLEGIANCE TO THE NORN QUEEN HERE AND NOW, I SHALL SEND LORD ODIN ALL THE FORCES AT MY COMMAND.
REFUSE AND NOTHING SHALL SAVE ASGARD FROM BLEAKEST DEFEAT.

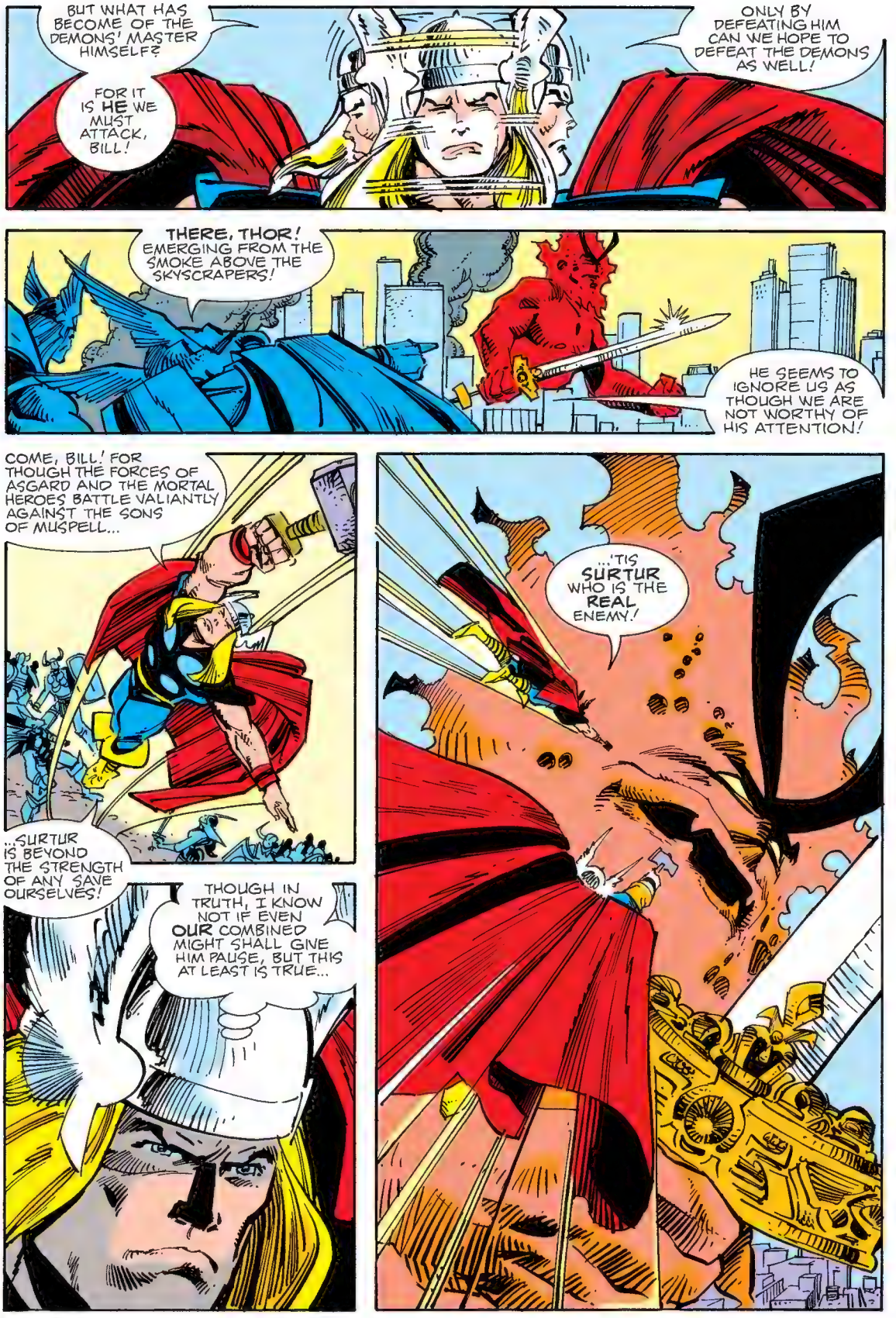
AT THAT MOMENT ON EARTH...
NOW, THOR, YOU SHALL SEE YOUR COMPANIONS DIE BEFORE I SLAY YOU MYSELF...
...AND KNOW THAT NOTHING YOU CAN DO WILL PREVENT THEIR DEATHS.
SLAY THEM, MY MINIONS!
WE'RE PINNED DOWN AND MY HANDS ARE CAUGHT!
I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO FREE THEM IN TIME TO WARD OFF THE BLOW!
KLA THASSH!
WHA--?! I'M FREE BUT THAT'S NOT THOR'S HAMMER!
AND THUNDERING ACROSS THE FROZEN HUDSON RNER INTO THE REALM OF MIDGARD...
FOR ODIN!
DEATH TO THE SONS OF FLAME!
THE FORCES OF ASGARD!
WELL MET, THOR!
IT SEEMS WE HAVE COME JUST IN TIME!

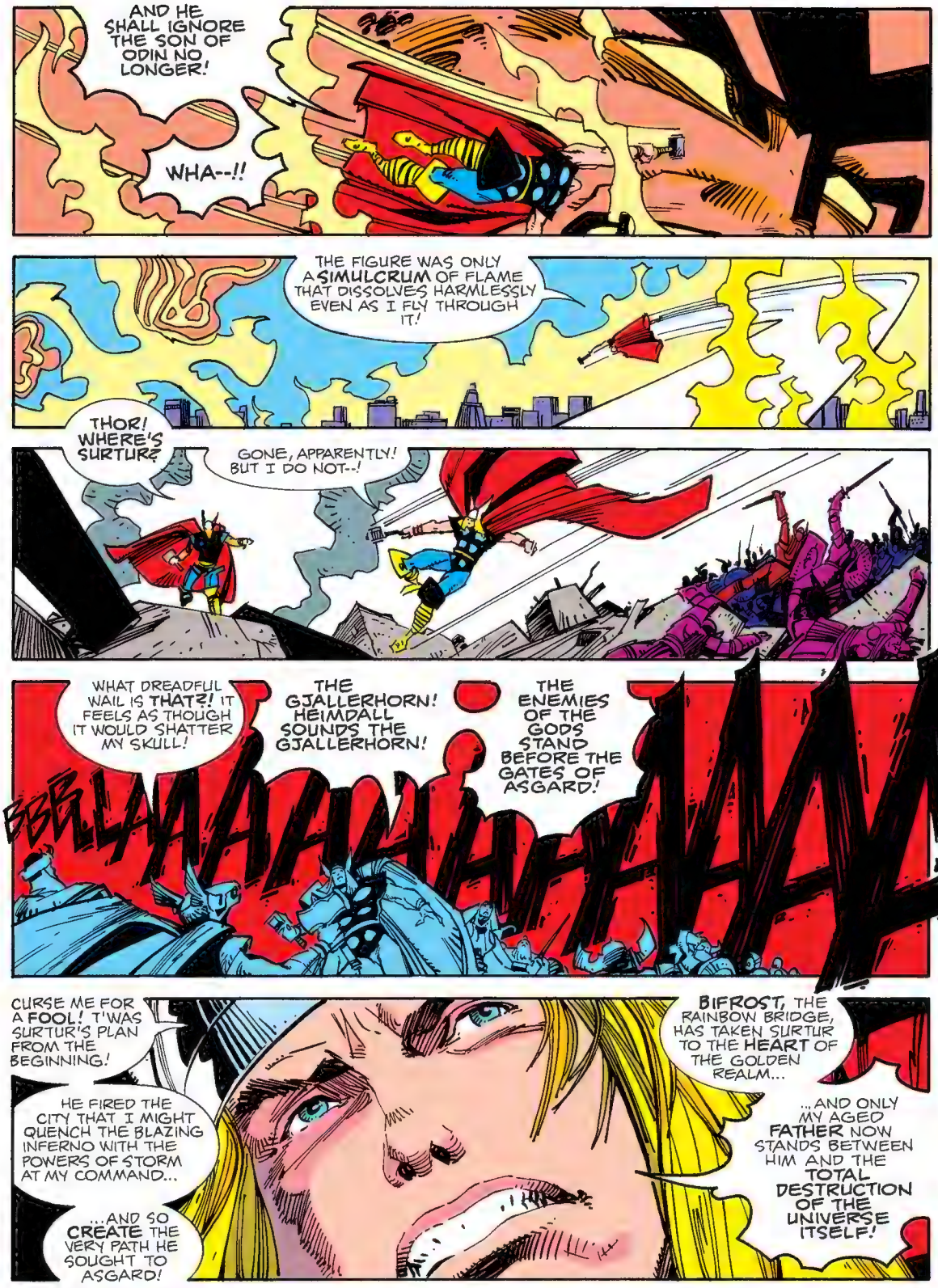

ON GUARD, YOU DEMONS! TURN AND FIGHT FOR YOUR LIVES! HOGUN THE GRIM COMMANDS IT!
BLAMMMM
COME ON, VOLSTAGG! HOGUN, SIF, AND I SHALL HAVE DESTROYED ALL OUR FOES ERE YOU CROSS THE FROZEN RIVER!
FAGGH! NO HORSE IS EQUAL TO THE TASK OF CARRYING MY HEROIC GIRTH, FANDRAL!
LET LESSER MEN SEEK TO RISE ABOVE THEIR FELLOWS ON THE BACKS OF SUCH POOR ANIMALS.
THEN LEAP TO THE SKY, VOLUMINOUS ONE, FOR YET ANOTHER WAVE OF OUR FOES RACES TO THE ATTACK!
VOLSTAGG SHALL LEAP INTO THE CRUSH OF BATTLE AND DESTROY HIS FOES WITH A SINGLE BOUND!
BUT AS THE FORCES OF ASGARD ENGAGE THE ENEMY ON ALL FRONTS...
NOW I MUST SEEK THE PATH TO ASGARD WHILE THE WARRIORS OF ODIN TRY TO STEM THE UNSTOPPABLE TIDE OF FIRE DEMONS!
THESE THINGS SEEM TO EXIST IN ENDLESS NUMBERS, EXECUTIONER!
AYE, ENCHANTRESS. AND FOR EVERY ONE WE SLAY, A DOZEN MORE RISE TO TAKE ITS PLACE.
WE NEED ALL THE AID WE CAN GET!
I GO TO FETCH ANOTHER WHO SHOULD BE HERE WITH US!
FTASSP!


CENTRAL PARK, COVERED WITH ICE AND SNOW BUT NORTH OF THE IMMEDIATE LINE OF BATTLE...
...AND IN A PENTHOUSE OVERLOOKING THE FROZEN LAKE...
THAT FLASH OF LIGHT! AN ASGARDIAN HAS ENTERED THIS PLACE!
YES, DEAR SISTER! THE ENCHANTRESS! COME TO CALL YOU TO BATTLE!
IT'S...
THOUGH WE HAVE NO LOVE LOST BETWEEN US, LORELEI, THE VERY EXISTENCE OF THE NINE WORLDS IS THREATENED BY THE FORCES OF FIRE AND EVERY HELP IS NEEDED!
I HAVE COME TO ASK YOU TO PUT ASIDE OUR FEUD AND JOIN WITH US.
DON'T BE SILLY, AMORA.
WHAT?!
DO YOU THINK THAT I DO NOT KNOW WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT?
LONG HAVE YOU SOUGHT TO WIN THE HANDSOME THOR...
...AND NOW THAT I HAVE MADE HIM MINE FOREVER WITH THE ENCHANTED MEAD, YOU SEEK TO HAVE ME SLAIN AND TAKE FOR YOURSELF WHAT YOU COULD NEVER WIN.
GO, AND LEAVE ME TO MY VICTORY. THOR IS MINE.
HOW SIMPLE YOU ARE, LORELEI. TO BALANCE A MERE INFATUATION AGAINST THE DESTRUCTION OF ALL THAT IS.
BUT MARK MY WORDS. SHOULD WE WIN THE BATTLE, I SHALL SEE TO IT THAT ALL YOUR CONTRIVANCES ARE UNDONE!
AND COUNT YOURSELF LUCKY THAT I CAN SPARE NO ENERGY TO DEAL WITH YOU AS YOU DESERVE!
FTAASSP!
I WONDER IF THAT WAS WISE.
BUT NO. THE GOLDEN MEAD HAS MADE THOR MINE FOREVER. THE MORE HE TASTES, THE TIGHTER HE WILL BE BOUND TO ME.
AND NOTHING MY SISTER CAN DO WILL CHANGE THAT!


BUT EVEN AS THE ENCHANTRESS REAPPEARS BESIDE THE EXECUTIONER...
...A PALL OF SMOKE RISES ABOVE THE CITY AS THE FIERY SONS OF MUSPELL TORCH EVERYTHING IN THEIR PATH.
THE FLAMES MAY DO THE INVADERS' WORK FOR THEM!
UNLESS WE CAN FIND SOME WAY TO STOP THEM, WE WILL SOON BE FIGHTING OVER A BURNED OUT CITY!
THEN WE HAD BEST ACT PROMPTLY!
IF WE CAN BUT CLEAR A SPACE FOR A MOMENT...
NO SOONER SAID THAN DONE, THOR. AND NOW?
IT IS BEYOND MY POWER TO BREAK THE ICY GRIP OF WINTER THROUGHOUT THE WORLD...
...BUT I THINK I CAN CREATE A LOCAL RAINSTORM TO DRENCH THE CITY AND EXTINGUISH THE FIRE!
BARROOOM!


THE FLAMES! THEY'RE GOING OUT!
YES, BUT THE TORRENTIAL DOWNPOUR IS HIDING THE DEMONS BEHIND A PALL OF SMOKE!
THE CITY ITSELF IS COMPLETELY OBSCURED FROM VIEW!
THEN BY MY COMMAND, LET THE RAIN CEASE, THE THUNDER'S VOICE BE STILLED!
THE STORM'S WORK IS DONE, FOR THE FLAMES HAVE DIED COMPLETELY!
AND EVEN AS WE WATCH, THE SMOKE LIFTS, REVEALING THE DEMON HORDES OF SURTUR ONCE AGAIN!


BUT WHAT HAS BECOME OF THE DEMONS' MASTER HIMSELF?
FOR IT IS HE WE MUST ATTACK, BILL!
ONLY BY DEFEATING HIM CAN WE HOPE TO DEFEAT THE DEMONS AS WELL!
THERE, THOR! EMERGING FROM THE SMOKE ABOVE THE SKYSCRAPERS!
HE SEEMS TO IGNORE US AS THOUGH WE ARE NOT WORTHY OF HIS ATTENTION!
COME, BILL! FOR THOUGH THE FORCES OF ASGARD AND THE MORTAL HEROES BATTLE VALIANTLY AGAINST THE SONS OF MUSPELL...
...SURTUR IS BEYOND THE STRENGTH OF ANY SAVE OURSELVES!
THOUGH IN TRUTH, I KNOW NOT IF EVEN OUR COMBINED MIGHT SHALL GIVE HIM PAUSE, BUT THIS AT LEAST IS TRUE...
...'TIS SURTUR WHO IS THE REAL ENEMY!


AND HE SHALL IGNORE THE SON OF ODIN NO LONGER!
WHA--!!
THE FIGURE WAS ONLY A SIMULCRUM OF FLAME THAT DISSOLVES HARMLESSLY EVEN AS I FLY THROUGH IT!
THOR! WHERE'S SURTUR?
GONE, APPARENTLY! BUT I DO NOT--!
WHAT DREADFUL WAIL IS THAT?! IT FEELS AS THOUGH IT WOULD SHATTER MY SKULL!
THE GJALLERHORN! HEIMDALL SOUNDS THE GJALLERHORN!
THE ENEMIES OF THE GODS STAND BEFORE THE GATES OF ASGARD!
BBBLAAA

MARVEL
the mighty
THOR
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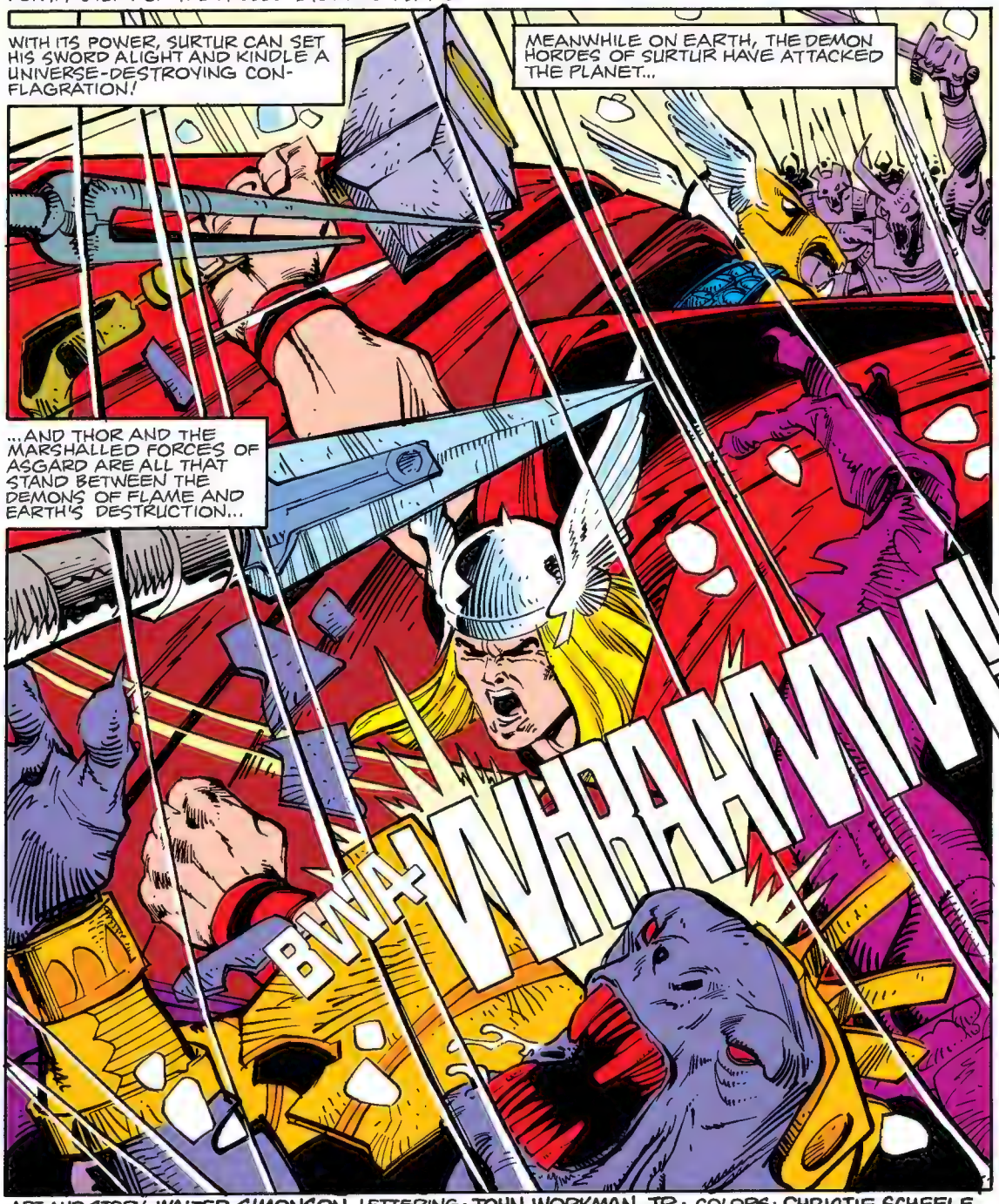
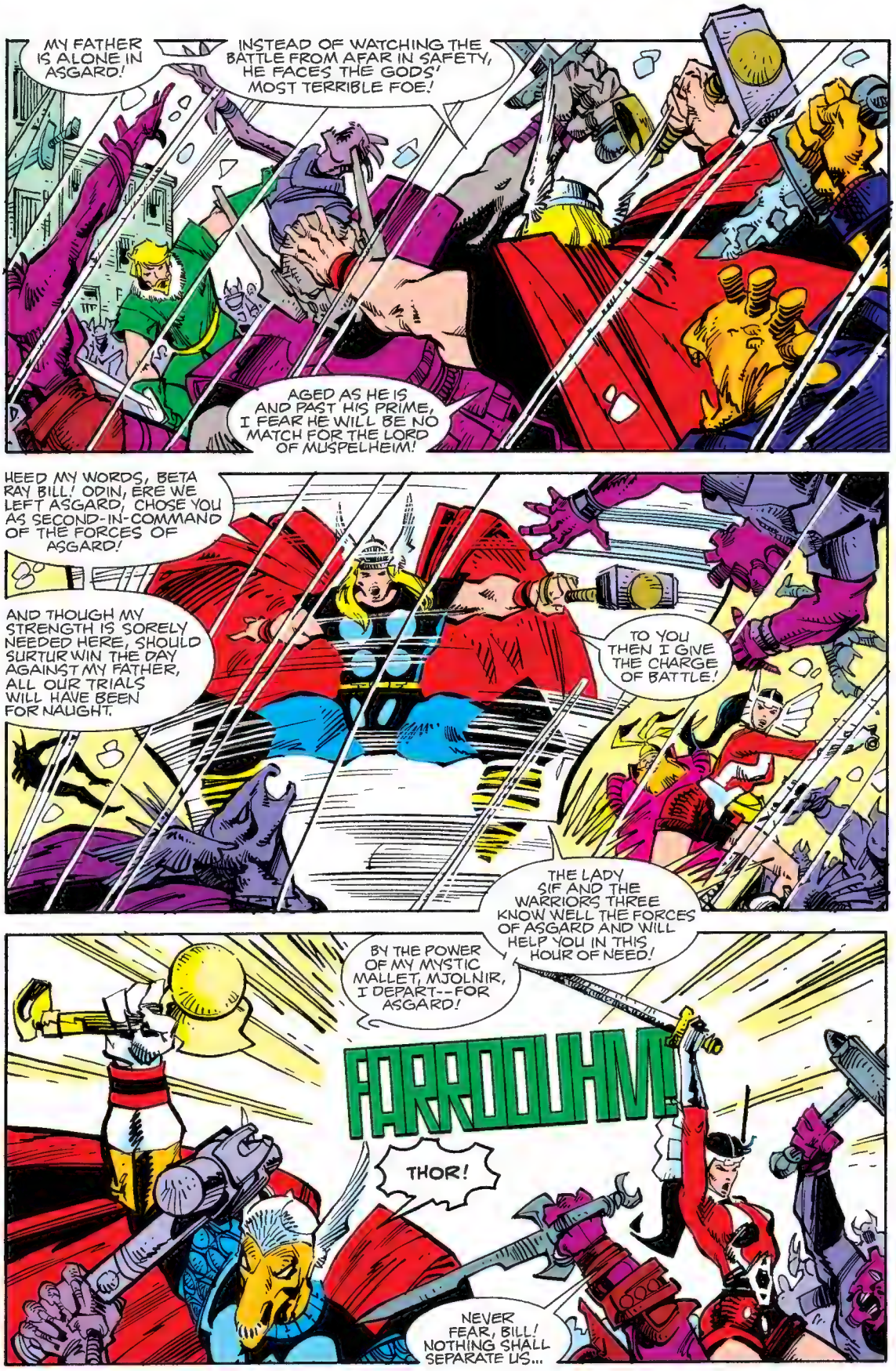
60¢
351
JAN
02450
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

STAN LEE PRESENTS: RAGNAROK & ROLL, TOO!

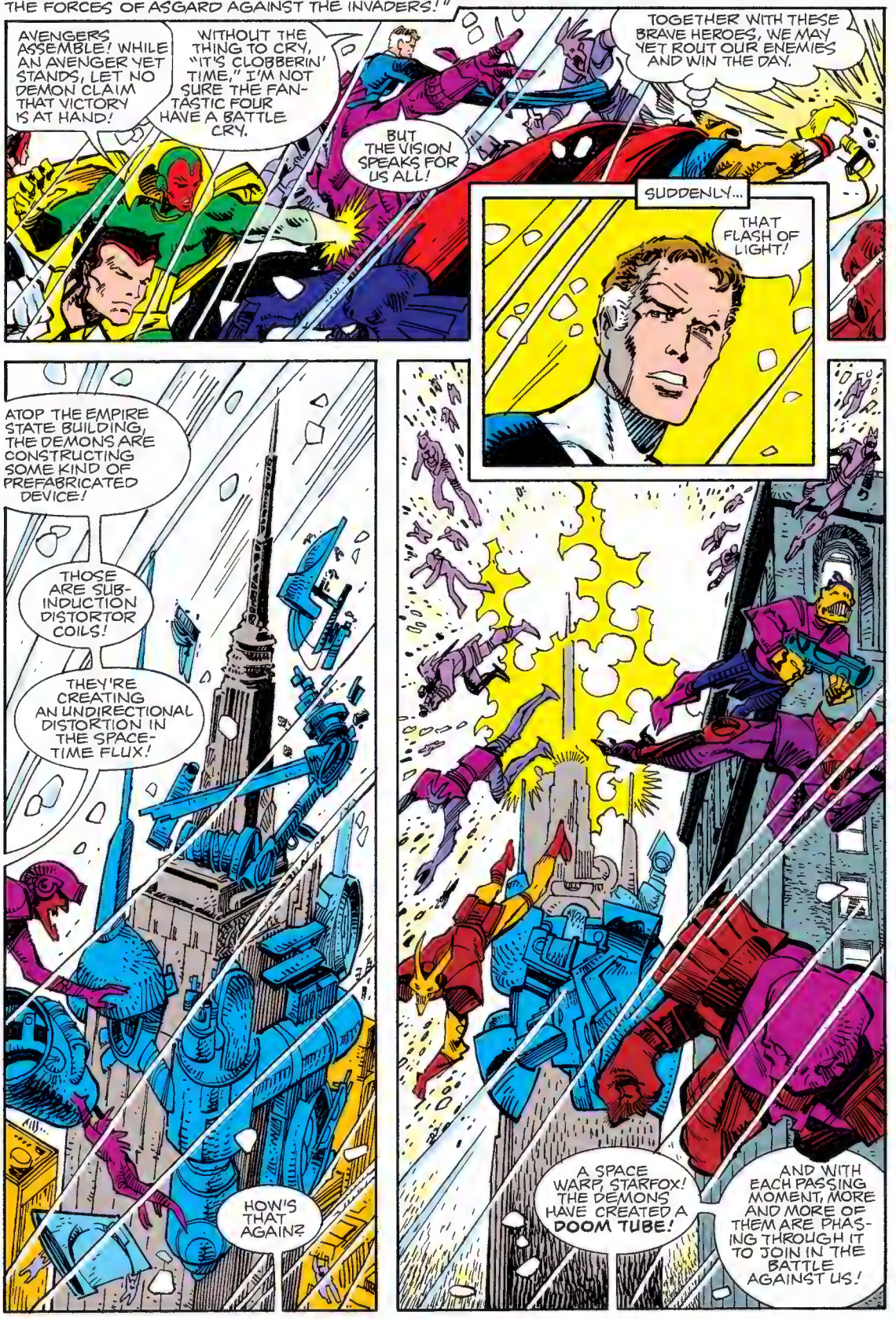
THE ANCIENT AND POWERFUL FIRE DEMON, SURTUR, HAS GONE TO ASGARD TO CONFRONT ODIN HIMSELF FOR MASTERY OF THE FABLED ETERNAL FLAME!

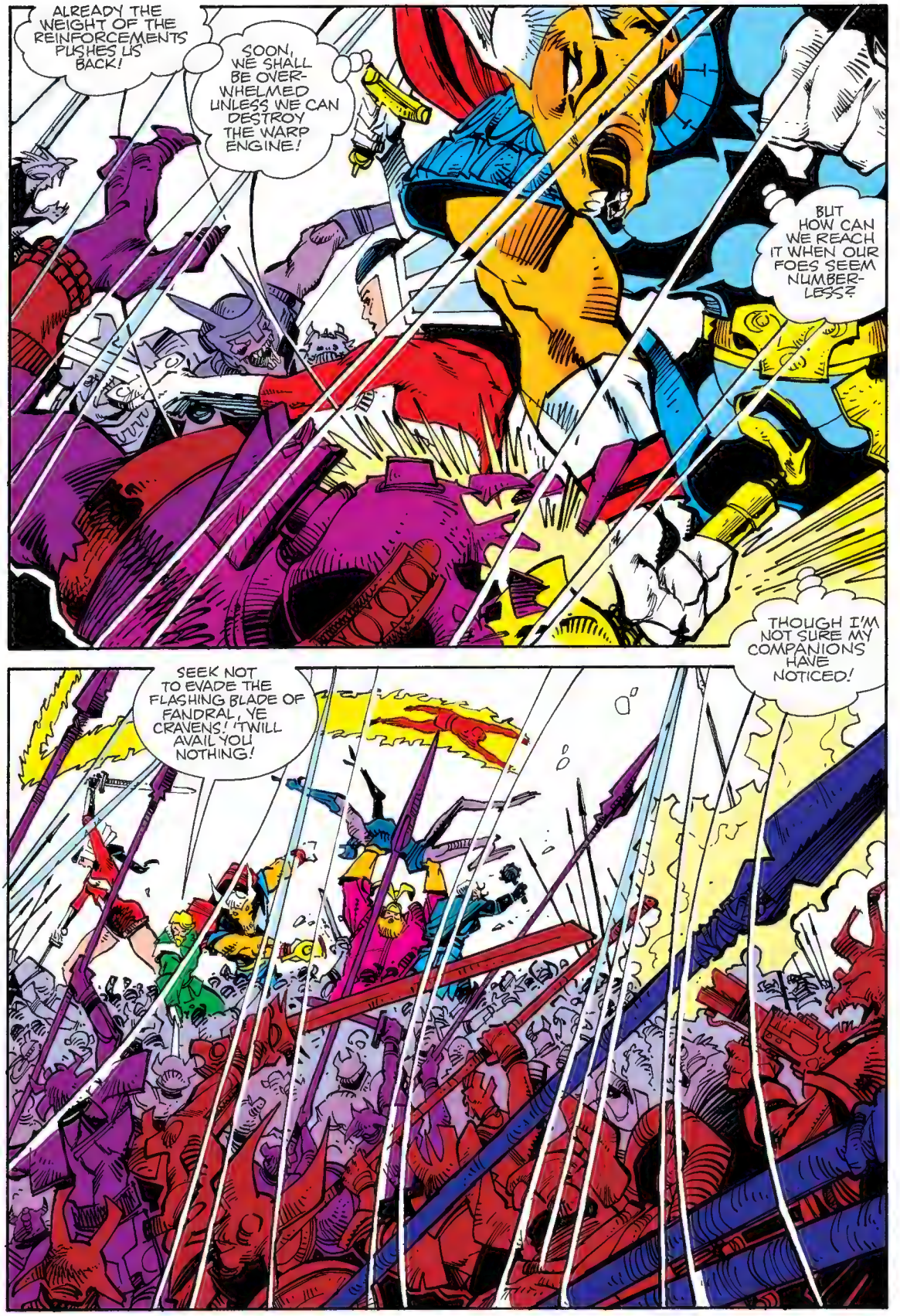

WITH ITS POWER, SURTUR CAN SET HIS SWORD ALIGHT AND KINDLE A UNIVERSE-DESTROYING CONFLAGRATION!
MEANWHILE ON EARTH, THE DEMON HORDES OF SURTUR HAVE ATTACKED THE PLANET...
...AND THOR AND THE MARSHALLED FORCES OF ASGARD ARE ALL THAT STAND BETWEEN THE DEMONS OF FLAME AND EARTH'S DESTRUCTION...
BWA
WRAAAM!!

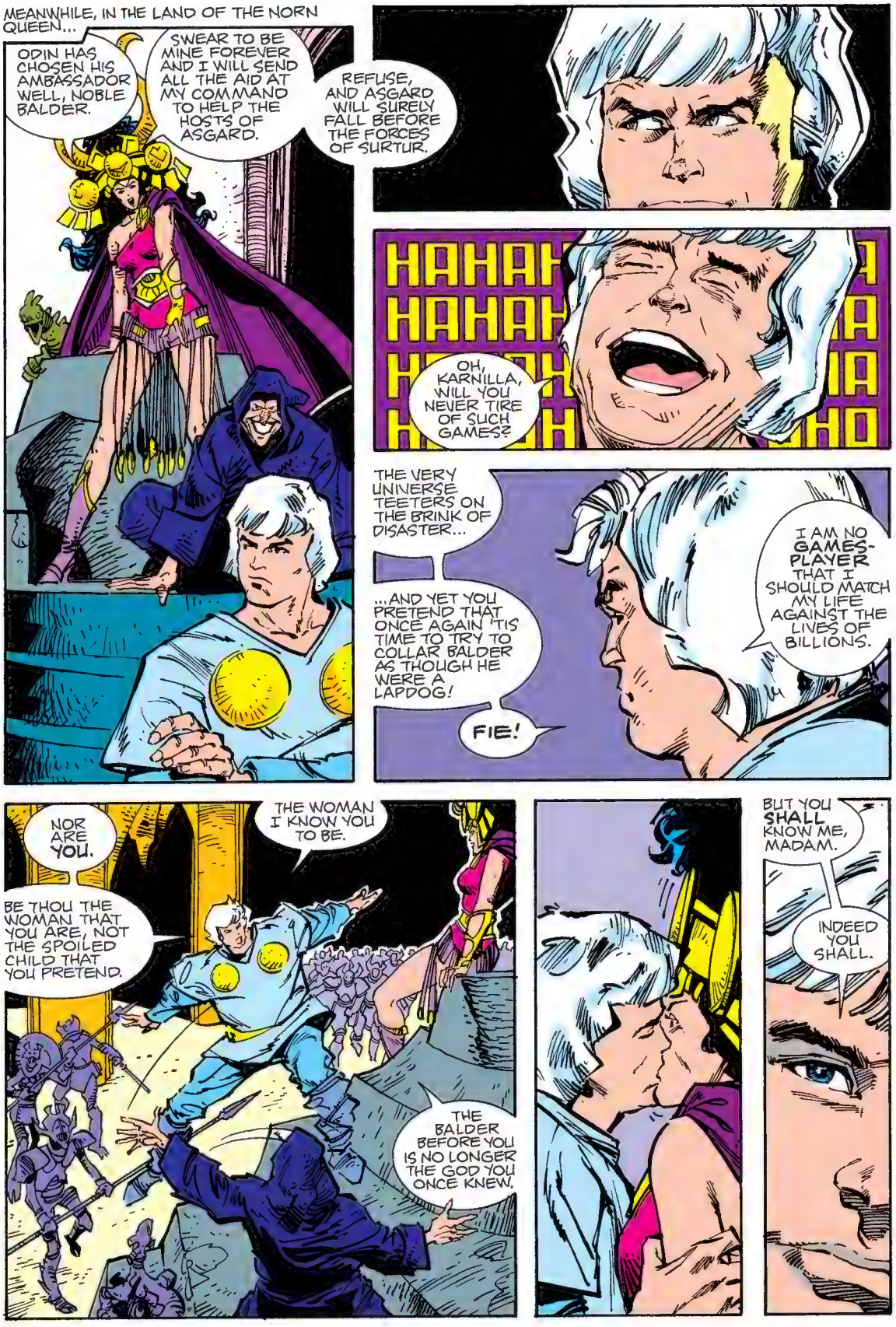
ART AND STORY: WALTER SIMONSON · LETTERING: JOHN WORKMAN, JR. · COLORS: CHRISTIE SCHEELE
EDITING: MARK GRUENWALD · EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: JIM SHOOTER


MY FATHER IS ALONE IN ASGARD!
INSTEAD OF WATCHING THE BATTLE FROM AFAR IN SAFETY, HE FACES THE GODS' MOST TERRIBLE FOE!
AGED AS HE IS AND PAST HIS PRIME, I FEAR HE WILL BE NO MATCH FOR THE LORD OF MUSPELHEIM!
HEED MY WORDS, BETA RAY BILL! ODIN, ERE WE LEFT ASGARD, CHOSE YOU AS SECOND-IN-COMMAND OF THE FORCES OF ASGARD!
AND THOUGH MY STRENGTH IS SORELY NEEDED HERE, SHOULD SURTUR WIN THE DAY AGAINST MY FATHER, ALL OUR TRIALS WILL HAVE BEEN FOR NAUGHT.
TO YOU THEN I GIVE THE CHARGE OF BATTLE!
THE LADY SIF AND THE WARRIORS THREE KNOW WELL THE FORCES OF ASGARD AND WILL HELP YOU IN THIS HOUR OF NEED!
BY THE POWER OF MY MYSTIC MALLET, MJOLNIR, I DEPART--FOR ASGARD!
FARRROOUHM!
THOR!
NEVER FEAR, BILL! NOTHING SHALL SEPARATE US...

"...AND THOUGH THOR IS GONE, SOME OF EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES FIGHT ON SIDE BY SIDE WITH THE FORCES OF ASGARD AGAINST THE INVADERS!"


AVENGERS ASSEMBLE! WHILE AN AVENGER YET STANDS, LET NO DEMON CLAIM THAT VICTORY IS AT HAND!
WITHOUT THE THING TO CRY, "IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME," I'M NOT SURE THE FANTASTIC FOUR HAVE A BATTLE CRY.
BUT THE VISION SPEAKS FOR US ALL!
TOGETHER WITH THESE BRAVE HEROES, WE MAY YET ROUT OUR ENEMIES AND WIN THE DAY.
SUDDENLY...
THAT FLASH OF LIGHT!
ATOP THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING, THE DEMONS ARE CONSTRUCTING SOME KIND OF PREFABRICATED DEVICE!
THOSE ARE SUB-INDUCTION DISTORTOR COILS!
THEY'RE CREATING AN UNDIRECTIONAL DISTORTION IN THE SPACE-TIME FLUX!
HOW'S THAT AGAIN?
A SPACE WARP, STARFOX! THE DEMONS HAVE CREATED A DOOM TUBE!
AND WITH EACH PASSING MOMENT, MORE AND MORE OF THEM ARE PHASING THROUGH IT TO JOIN IN THE BATTLE AGAINST US!


ALREADY THE WEIGHT OF THE REINFORCEMENTS PUSHES US BACK!
SOON, WE SHALL BE OVER-WHELMED UNLESS WE CAN DESTROY THE WARP ENGINE!
BUT HOW CAN WE REACH IT WHEN OUR FOES SEEM NUMBER-LESS?
THOUGH I'M NOT SURE MY COMPANIONS HAVE NOTICED!
SEEK NOT TO EVADE THE FLASHING BLADE OF FANDRAL, YE CRAVENS! 'TWILL AVAIL YOU NOTHING!


MEANWHILE, IN THE LAND OF THE NORN QUEEN...
ODIN HAS CHOSEN HIS AMBASSADOR WELL, NOBLE BALDER.
SWEAR TO BE MINE FOREVER AND I WILL SEND ALL THE AID AT MY COMMAND TO HELP THE HOSTS OF ASGARD.
REFUSE, AND ASGARD WILL SURELY FALL BEFORE THE FORCES OF SURTUR.
HAHAH
HAHAH
OH, KARNILLA, WILL YOU NEVER TIRE OF SUCH GAMES?
THE VERY UNIVERSE TEETERS ON THE BRINK OF DISASTER...
...AND YET YOU PRETEND THAT ONCE AGAIN 'TIS TIME TO TRY TO COLLAR BALDER AS THOUGH HE WERE A LAPDOG!
FIE!
I AM NO GAMES-PLAYER THAT I SHOULD MATCH MY LIFE AGAINST THE LIVES OF BILLIONS.
NOR ARE YOU.
BE THOU THE WOMAN THAT YOU ARE, NOT THE SPOILED CHILD THAT YOU PRETEND.
THE WOMAN I KNOW YOU TO BE.
THE BALDER BEFORE YOU IS NO LONGER THE GOD YOU ONCE KNEW.
BUT YOU SHALL KNOW ME, MADAM.
INDEED YOU SHALL.

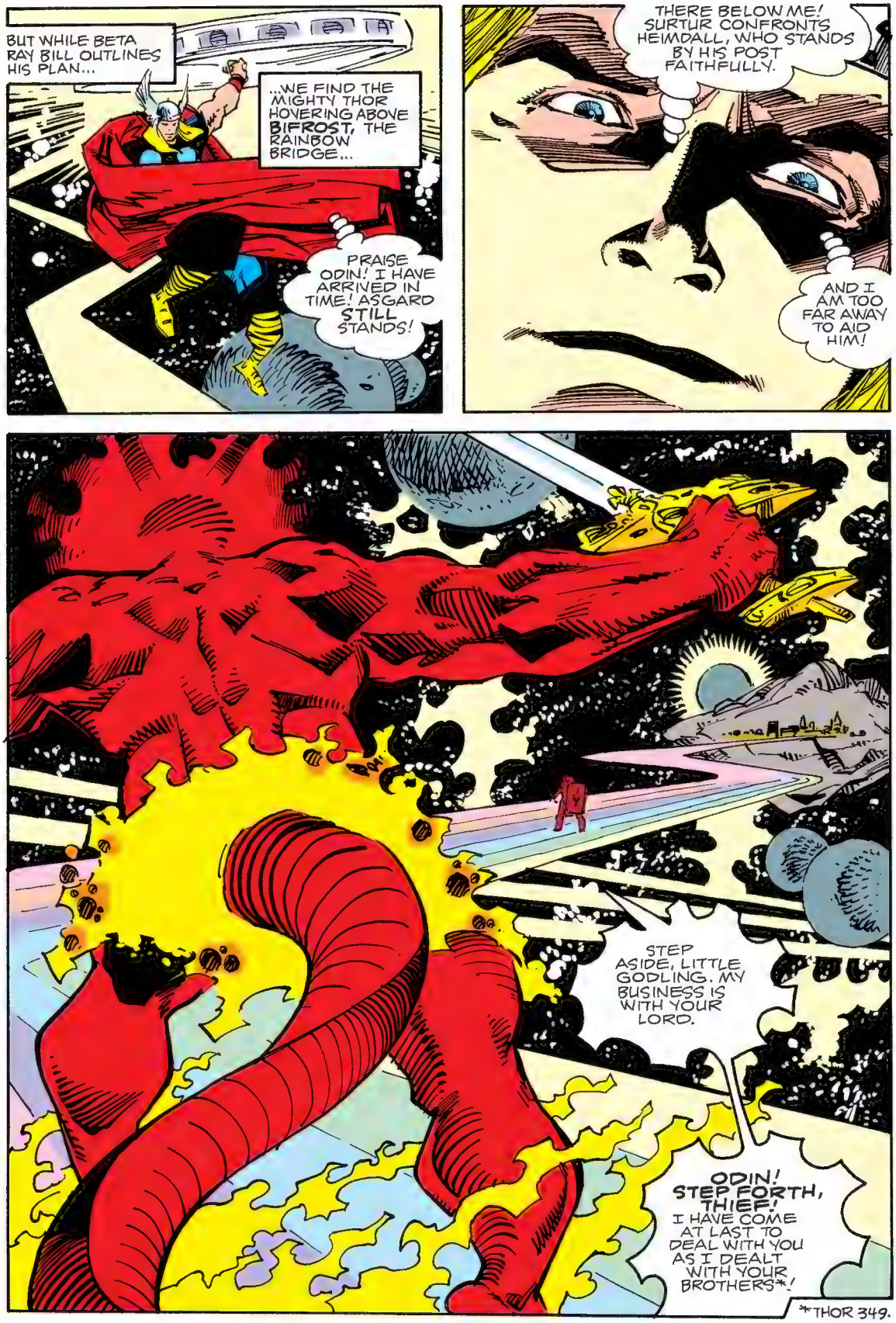
WHILE ON EARTH...
BY MY TROTH, HOGUN, STAND ASIDE THAT I MAY SMITE THESE BEGGARS AS THEY DESERVE.
REST THY WAGGING TONGUE, VOLUMINOUS ONE! SURELY THERE ARE FOES APLENTY FOR ALL.
TOO MANY FOR YOU TO SEE EVERYWHERE, ASGARDIANS, ONCE I SLAY THIS MOCKERY OF THOR, THE REST WILL FALL!
WATCH OUT!
BLAM! BLAM!
GHAK!
YOU GOTTA REMEMBER TO WATCH YOUR BACK BETTER, THOR...
...'CAUSE SOONER OR LATER-- HUH?
MY THANKS, BUT AS YOU CAN SEE, I'M NOT THE MIGHTY THOR.
MY MISTAKE. YOU MUST BE BETA RAY BILL. THOR TALKED ABOUT YOU SOME WHEN WE WERE TOGETHER. PLEASED TO MEET YOU.
I'M ROGER WILLIS.
IS THOR AROUND? I'VE GOT SOMETHING REAL IMPORTANT TO TELL HIM!
POW!
THOR HAS RETURNED TO ASGARD ABRUPTLY. I AM IN COMMAND OF THE FORCES OF ASGARD NOW.
NO KIDDING.
THEN YOU'RE JUST THE GUY I WANT TO TALK TO.

HEAR HIM OUT, BILL. ROGER WAS THOR'S COMPANION IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST MALEKITH.*
I DON'T KNOW HOW TO BEAT THE DEMONS! BUT I MAY KNOW HOW TO BEAT THE WEATHER.
THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS RELEASED THE STORMS THAT ARE HELPING TO WIPE US OUT!
ORIGINALLY, THE CASKET WAS LEFT TO ME BY MY FATHER, ALONG WITH SOME PAPERS CONCERNING ITS NATURE.
*THOR 345-349--EPIC STUFF.
I'VE BEEN STUDYING THOSE PAPERS SINCE THOR AND I RETURNED FROM ENGLAND. AND I MAY HAVE FOUND AN ANSWER.
BUT I NEED TO GET TO ENGLAND AND FAST!
PERHAPS I CAN HELP. I'M REED RICHARDS, LEADER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?
MOMENTS LATER, AFTER A HURRIED DISCUSSION...
THE HUMAN TORCH MAY BE THE ANSWER.
JOHNNY!
REED, I CAN'T STOP THESE GUYS! THEY'RE EATING MY FLAME LIKE IT WAS CANDY!
I THINK THERE'S SOMETHING YOU CAN DO, JOHNNY.
ROGER HERE HAS TO GET TO ENGLAND AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AND HE'S GOING TO NEED YOUR HELP.
IN THE BAXTER BUILDING, THERE'S A PROTOTYPE GRAVITY ACCELERATION VEHICLE I'VE BEEN CONSTRUCTING IN MY SPARE TIME.
THE RIPROAR I?
PRECISELY. YOU KNOW WHERE THE KEYS ARE.
GOOD LUCK, LAD.
AND SHORTLY, WITHOUT A SOUND, THE RIPROAR I SOARS ALOFT ABOVE THE BAXTER BUILDING INTO THE STORMY SKY...
IF THIS BABY CAN DO EVERYTHING REED WANTED IT TO, WE'RE GOING TO BE IN ENGLAND BEFORE YOU KNOW IT.
NOW WHAT'S THE SCORE?

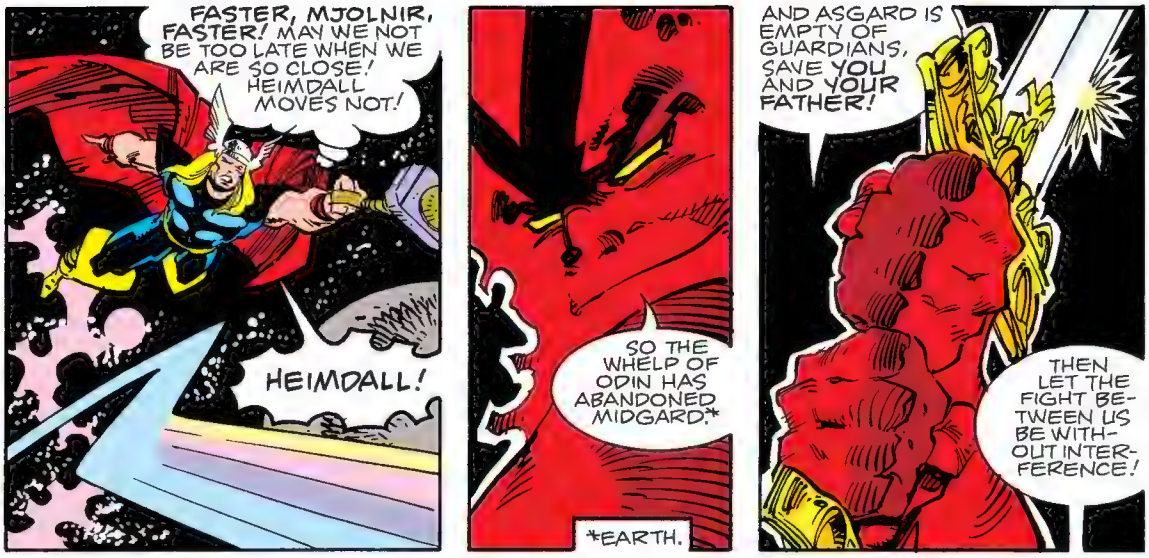
BUT AS JOHNNY STORM AND ROGER WILLIS WING THEIR WAY ACROSS THE ATLANTIC OCEAN TOWARDS THE SCEPTERED ISLE OF BRITAIN...
IT LOOKS BAD. THE DEMONS ARE REINFORCED FASTER THAN WE CAN KILL THEM OFF.
AND WE'RE BEING FORCED BACK TO THE TIP OF THIS ISLAND!
IN SPITE OF OUR BEST EFFORTS, IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE...
BLAM!
KER-WHAM!
ARUGGGRRH!
WHUPWHUPWHUPWHUP
LANDING ZONE'S RIGHT BELOW US! GET US DOWN ON THE DECK ON THE DOUBLE!
HIT 'EM HARD, BOYS! LET'S POP SOME CAPS*!
TIME TO SHOW 'EM WHAT THE 82ND AIRBORNE CAN DO! THE SCREAMIN' EAGLES HAVE ARRIVED!
BUDDA! BUDDA! BUDDA!
MAJOR SAULEDA REPORTING, SIR. I'M INFORMED THAT YOU ARE IN COMMAND OF THE AVENGERS.
WE'RE FROM THE QUICK REACTION FORCES OUT OF FT. BRAGG.
WHAT'S THE SITUATION?
*WEAPONS ON RAPID FIRE.

NOT GOOD, COLONEL. THESE DEMONS SEEM TO BE PHASING IN THROUGH THE WARP GATE ABOVE THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING.
THOSE WARPS ARE APPEARING ALL OVER THE WORLD. SATELLITE DATA SHOWS US THAT THESE GUYS ARE USING THE SAHARA DESERT AS A STAGING AREA.
WE THINK THEY'RE PHASING IN RE-INFORCEMENTS THERE AND THEN SPREADING THEM OUT TO VARIOUS POINTS OF ATTACK.
TROOP ESTIMATES ARE STAGGERING, BUT WHAT WE SEE HERE IS ONLY A SMALL PART OF THE ENTIRE FORCE.
THEN WE'D BETTER DESTROY THAT GATEWAY BEFORE MANY MORE OF THEM GET THROUGH.
SIF! FANDRAL! HOGUN! VOLSTAGG! CALL THE WARRIORS OF VALHALLA TO MY SIDE!
I HAVE AN IDEA.
HOLY SMOKES! WHO'S THAT?
AS FAR AS YOU'RE CONCERNED, COLONEL, I AM THOR!
AND THE BATTLE IS MINE TO COMMAND!
NOW HOLD ON A MINUTE, MISTER!
HE SPEAKS TRULY, MAJOR. BILL CARRIES THE POWER OF THOR AND HE IS THE COMMANDER OF THE FORCES OF ASGARD.
AND IN THIS BATTLE, THE AVENGERS FOLLOW HIS ORDERS.
WELL, OKAY, VISION. YOU'RE IN CHARGE. DOES THE PRESIDENT KNOW ABOUT THIS?

HAROKIN, CAPTAIN OF THE EINHERJAR, THE HEROES OF VALHALLA, REPORTING AS ORDERED! WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE US DO?
WE MUST DESTROY THAT GATEWAY, HAROKIN, BEFORE THE DEMONS OVERWHELM US WITH SHEER WEIGHT OF NUMBERS.
AT MY COMMAND, YOU AND YOUR MEN SHALL CHARGE INTO THE VERY HEART OF THE DEMONS GATHERED BEFORE THE GATE.
AND WHEN YOUR CHARGE BREAKS AGAINST THE DEMON WALL, I WANT YOU TO RETREAT IN CONFUSION.
PULL BACK AND LET THE DEMONS FOLLOW YOU.
WHAT?!! NO WARRIOR OF VALHALLA WOULD THINK TO TURN HIS FACE FROM THE ENEMY AND RUN LIKE A COWARD!
NEVER-THELESS, YOU WILL DO IT!
THOUGH I AM BUT NEWLY COME TO VALHALLA, EILIF DRAGONSLAYER SAYS UNTO YOU THAT DESPITE HIS STRANGE FACE, BILL WAS APPOINTED OUR CHIEFTAIN BY LORD ODIN AND WE WILL OBEY HIM.
THOR, TOO, HAS GIVEN HIM COMMAND.
IN THIS, I AM RESOLVED.
SO SAY WE ALL, HAROKIN. 'TIS NO TIME TO DEBATE LEADERSHIP.
YOUR REBUKE IS WELL TAKEN, MY LORD TYR. I STAND READY TO DO WHAT I MUST.
CHIN UP, HAROKIN. IF MY PLAN WORKS, EVEN YOU MAY HAVE HAD YOUR FILL OF FIGHTING BEFORE THIS DAY IS THROUGH.
HERE'S WHAT WE HAVE TO DO.
TYR, YOU AND THE EXECUTIONER MUST MUMBLE MUMBLE MUMBLE


BUT WHILE BETA RAY BILL OUTLINES HIS PLAN...
...WE FIND THE MIGHTY THOR HOVERING ABOVE BIFROST, THE RAINBOW BRIDGE...
PRAISE ODIN! I HAVE ARRIVED IN TIME! ASGARD STILL STANDS!
THERE BELOW ME! SURTUR CONFRONTS HEIMDALL, WHO STANDS BY HIS POST FAITHFULLY.
AND I AM TOO FAR AWAY TO AID HIM!
STEP ASIDE, LITTLE GODLING. MY BUSINESS IS WITH YOUR LORD.
ODIN! STEP FORTH, THIEF! I HAVE COME AT LAST TO DEAL WITH YOU AS I DEALT WITH YOUR BROTHERS*!
*THOR 349.

STAND YOUR GROUND, SURTUR OF MUSPELHEIM. YOU HAVE DEFILED THE BRIDGE WITH YOUR VERY PRESENCE AND ALREADY HAVE MUCH TO ANSWER FOR.
THE GOLDEN REALM OF ASGARD IS NOT FOR SUCH AS YOU.
WHEN I AM THROUGH, LITTLE GODLING, THE GOLDEN REALM WILL NO LONGER EXIST EXCEPT AS ASHES!
HAVE AT YOU, SURTUR! FOR ODIN AND ASGARD!
KWRAWHCKKK
PLAOGGG!
WELL STRUCK, HEIMDALL. BUT THOUGH YOU MAY HAVE POWER ENOUGH TO FELL A DOZEN ORDINARY FOES, SURTUR IS MASTER HERE!

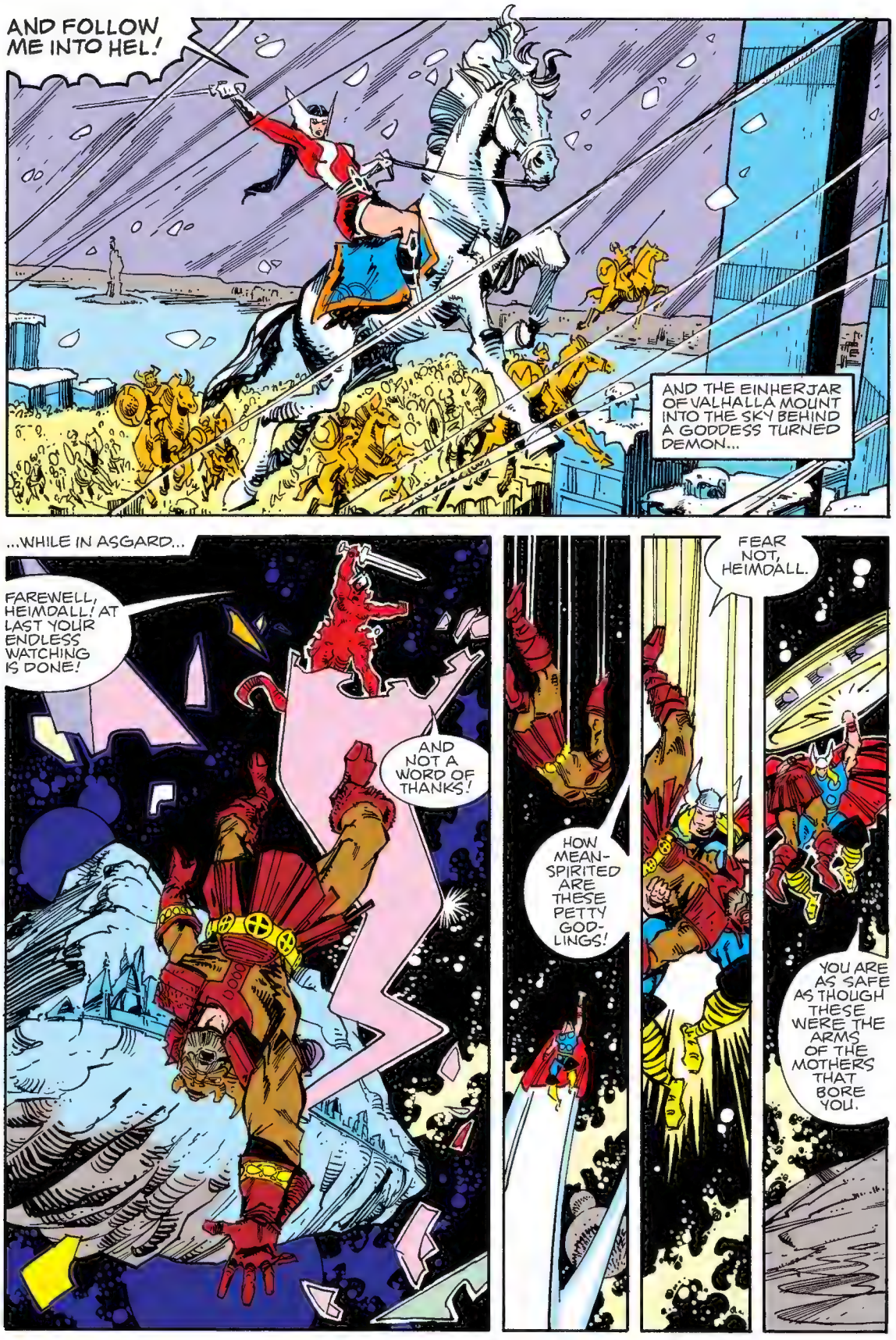

FASTER, MJOLNIR, FASTER! MAY WE NOT BE TOO LATE WHEN WE ARE SO CLOSE! HEIMDALL MOVES NOT!
HEIMDALL!
SO THE WHELP OF ODIN HAS ABANDONED MIDGARD.*
*EARTH.
AND ASGARD IS EMPTY OF GUARDIANS, SAVE YOU AND YOUR FATHER!
THEN LET THE FIGHT BE-TWEEN US BE WITH-OUT INTER-FERENCE!

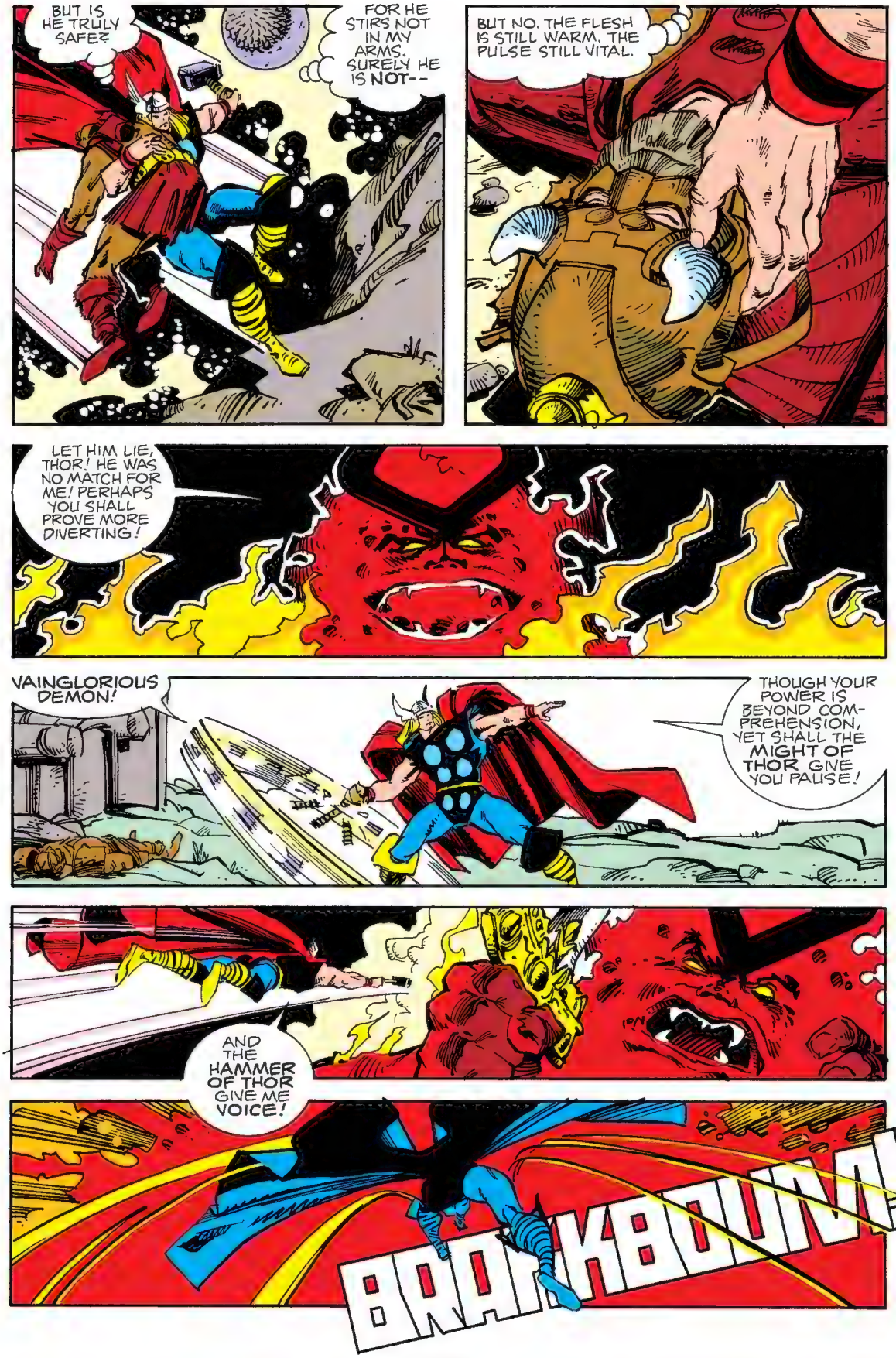
I WILL SUNDER THE RAINBOW BRIDGE AND DESTROY THE LINK BETWEEN THE MORTAL REALM AND ASGARD!
NOW SHALL THE LORD OF ASGARD TRULY BE BEYOND ALL HELP!
SHARKADOOM

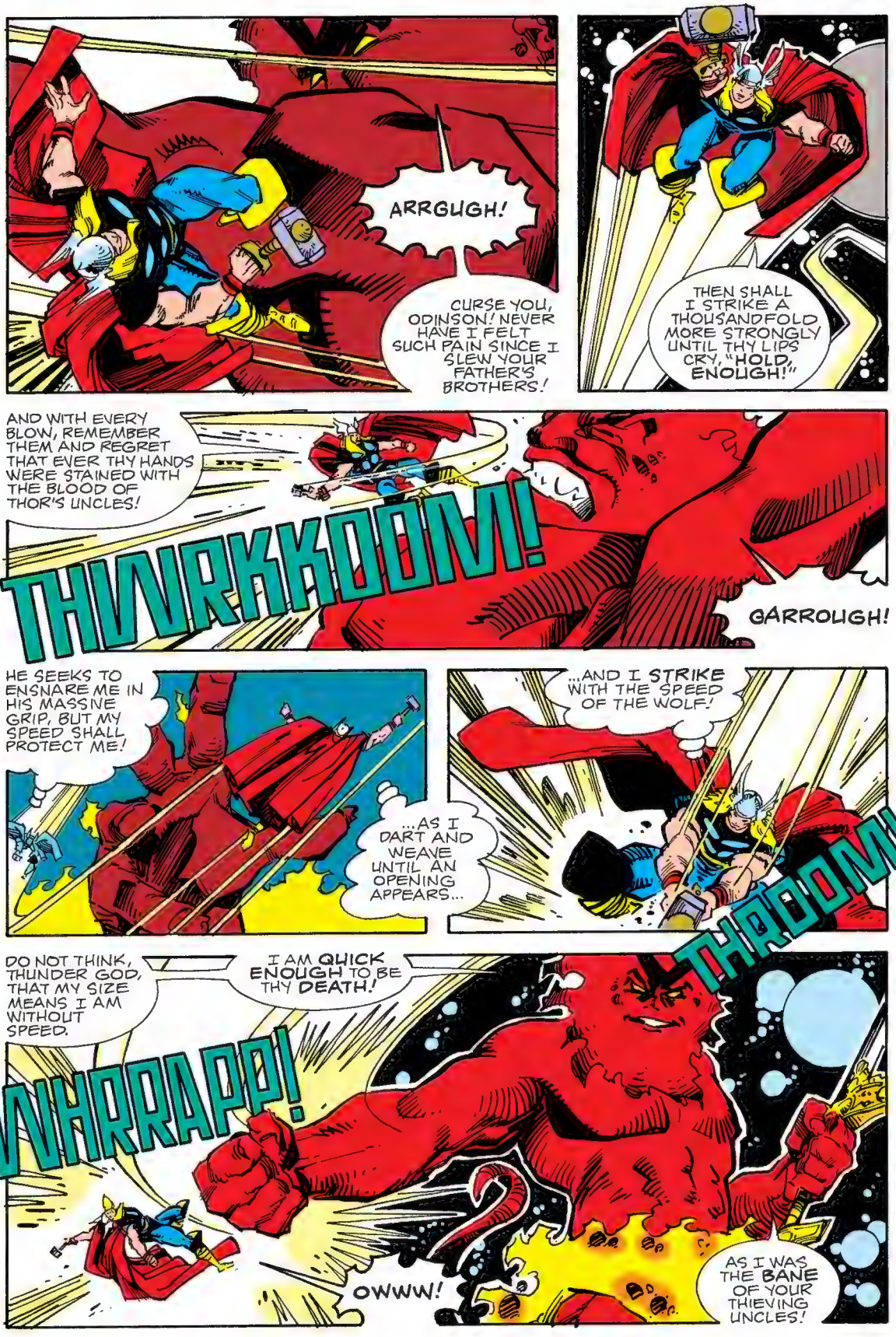
MEANWHILE, IN THE MOUNTAINS NOT FAR BEYOND THE GOLDEN REALM, FRIGGA, WIFE OF ODIN, LEADS THE CHILDREN OF ASGARD AWAY FROM THE IMPENDING BATTLE TO A PLACE OF SAFETY...
KEEP TO THE PATH NOW, AND HOLD ON TIGHT TO EACH OTHER.
FRIGGA, DO YOU THINK WE'LL REALLY MEET ANY DANGER ALONG THE TRAIL...
...OR WAS ODIN JUST PRETENDING SO HE COULD GET RID OF US?
IF ODIN SAID THERE IS DANGER, HILDY, DEAR, THEN I'M SURE THERE IS.
BUT ONCE WE GET BEYOND THE BRIDGE ABOVE THE ENDLESS CHASM, I THINK WE SHALL BE SAFE ENOUGH.
MIND THE STEP, GUNNAR.
GUNNAR?
FRIGGA, LOOK!
A TROLL!
THIS BRIDGE MINE, YOU PASS ONLY WITH FORFEIT.
I TAKE ONE YOUNGLING ...FOR DINNER!
OR I KILL YOU ALL!

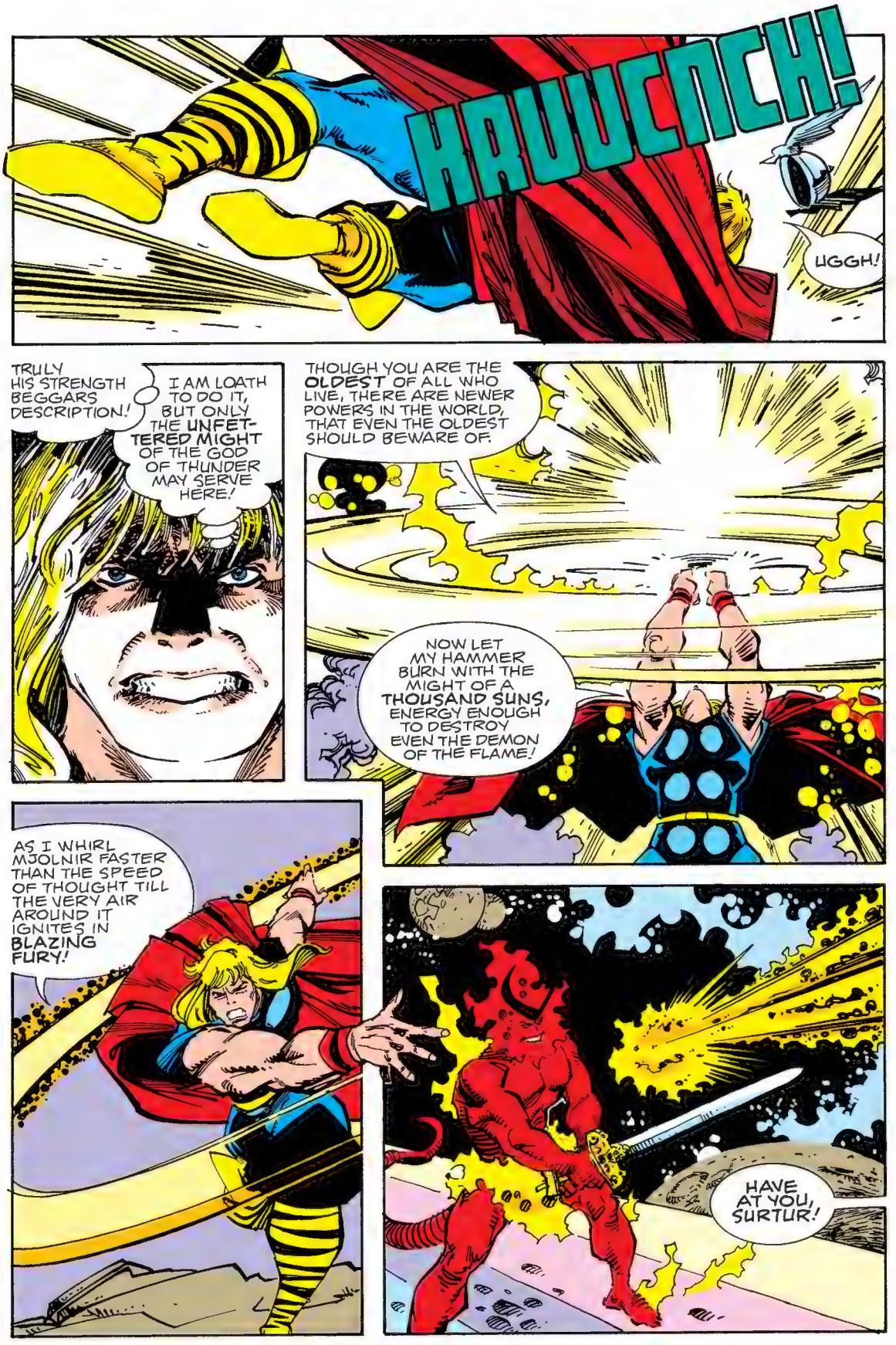
MEANWHILE, ON MANHATTAN ISLAND...
TYR AND THE EXECUTIONER HAVE TAKEN THEIR FORCES AND BEGUN TO PREPARE, SIF.
AND THE MORTAL ARMY IS HOLDING ITS OWN FOR NOW. BUT THE SKY BEGINS TO BLACKEN WITH THE FORCES OF THE DEMONS.' I WONDER IF-- SIF?
BILL! THE AIR!
'TIS FILLED WITH SHARDS OF COLOR!
WHAT ARE THEY?
DON'T YOU SEE? IT'S FROM THE BRIDGE! THE RAINBOW BRIDGE HAS BEEN BROKEN!
SOMETHING TERRIBLE IS HAPPENING IN ASGARD!
THOR AND ODIN MAY EVEN NOW BE DYING!
AND I AM NOT THERE!
BUT BY THE GODDESS-BORN POWERS OF SPACE AND TIME I POSSESS, I SHALL BE!
NO!

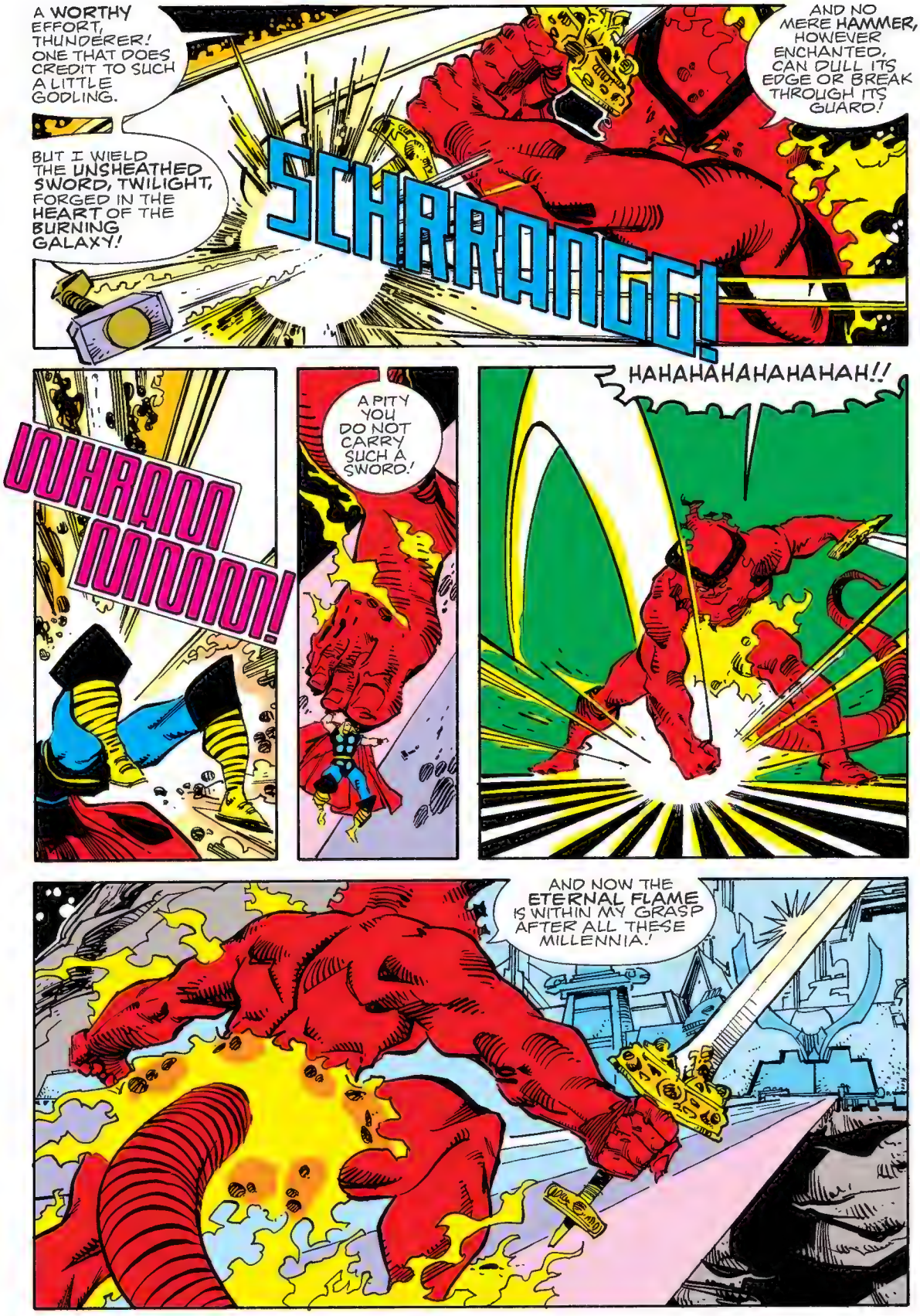
BILL!
YOU SHALL NOT GO!
IS THIS HOW YOU KEEP YOUR PLEDGE?
"NOTHING SHALL SEPARATE US!"
EVEN NOW, MORE AND MORE DEMONS ARE PHASING IN TO JOIN THE BATTLE.
YOUR SKILL, YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE FORCES OF ASGARD ARE NEEDED HERE!
BUT ODIN! AND THOR!
IF THOR AND THE ALL-FATHER CANNOT STOP SURTUR, THEN NO ONE CAN.
IN YOUR HEART, WARRIOR MAID, YOU KNOW THIS IS TRUE!
SHATTER!
ODIN'S BLOOD!
THEN LET ME SIT NO LONGER IDLY BY WHILE THE NOBLEST GODS OF ALL POUR OUT THEIR HEARTS BLOOD.
SIF!
HAROKIN! WARRIORS OF VALHALLA! HEED MY CALL!
THE DEMONS' INFERNAL MACHINERY ABOVE THE CITY BECKONS.
SHALL WE LIVE FOREVER?
RISE UP, YOU GREAT HEARTS! DRAW YOUR WEAPONS!

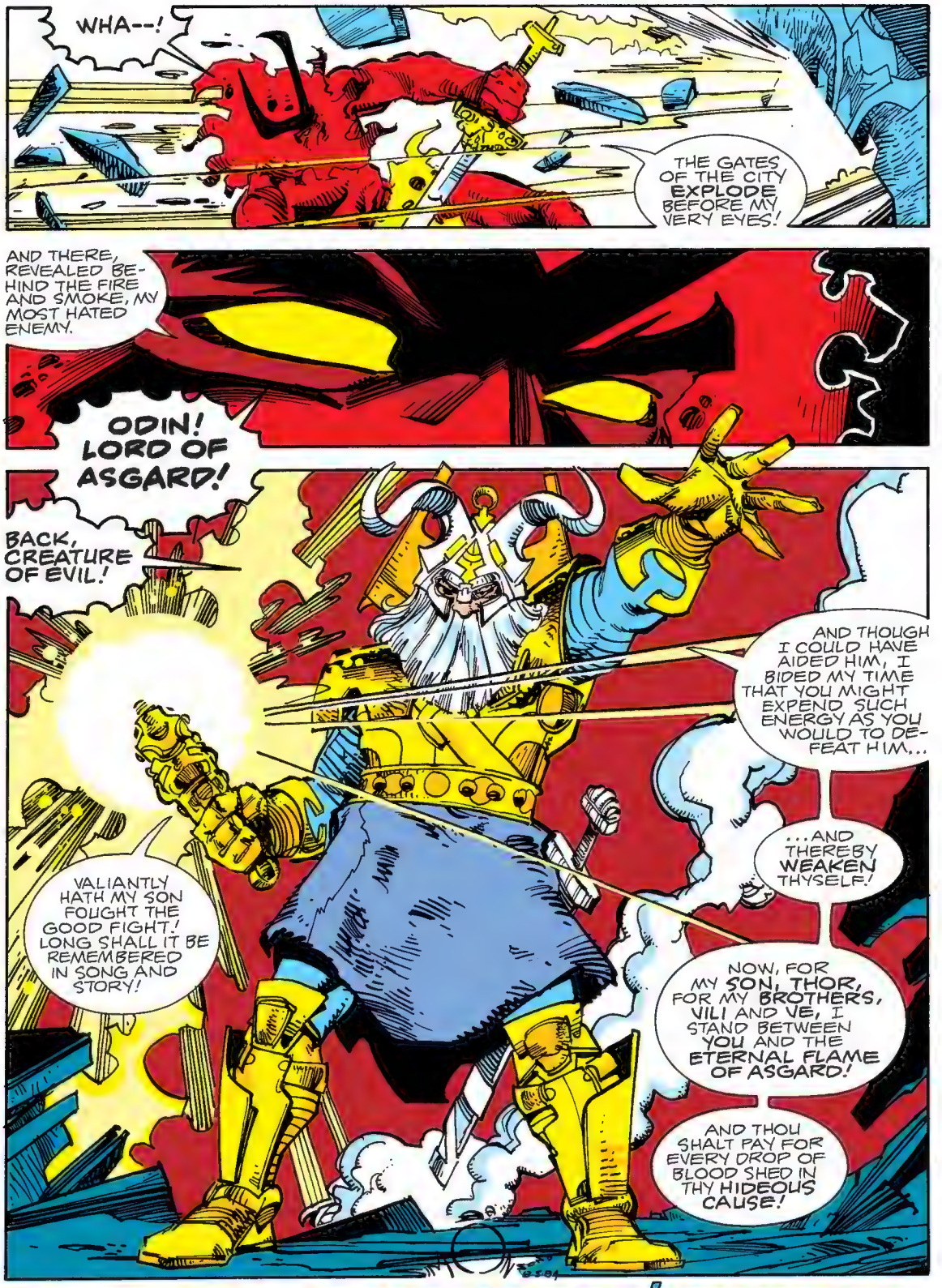

AND FOLLOW ME INTO HEL!
AND THE EINHERJAR OF VALHALLA MOUNT INTO THE SKY BEHIND A GODDESS TURNED DEMON...
...WHILE IN ASGARD...
FAREWELL, HEIMDALL! AT LAST YOUR ENDLESS WATCHING IS DONE!
AND NOT A WORD OF THANKS!
HOW MEAN-SPIRITED ARE THESE PETTY GOD-LINGS!
FEAR NOT, HEIMDALL.
YOU ARE AS SAFE AS THOUGH THESE WERE THE ARMS OF THE MOTHERS THAT BORE YOU.


BUT IS HE TRULY SAFE?
FOR HE STIRS NOT IN MY ARMS. SURELY HE IS NOT--
BUT NO. THE FLESH IS STILL WARM. THE PULSE STILL VITAL.
LET HIM LIE, THOR! HE WAS NO MATCH FOR ME! PERHAPS YOU SHALL PROVE MORE DIVERTING!
VAINGLORIOUS DEMON!
THOUGH YOUR POWER IS BEYOND COMPREHENSION, YET SHALL THE MIGHT OF THOR GIVE YOU PAUSE!
AND THE HAMMER OF THOR GIVE ME VOICE!
BRAAKBOOM!


ARRGUGH!
CURSE YOU, ODINSON! NEVER HAVE I FELT SUCH PAIN SINCE I SLEW YOUR FATHER'S BROTHERS!
THEN SHALL I STRIKE A THOUSANDFOLD MORE STRONGLY UNTIL THY LIPS CRY, "HOLD, ENOUGH!"
AND WITH EVERY BLOW, REMEMBER THEM AND REGRET THAT EVER THY HANDS WERE STAINED WITH THE BLOOD OF THOR'S UNCLES!
THWRKKOOM!
GARROUGH!
HE SEEKS TO ENSNARE ME IN HIS MASSIVE GRIP, BUT MY SPEED SHALL PROTECT ME!
...AS I DART AND WEAVE UNTIL AN OPENING APPEARS...
...AND I STRIKE WITH THE SPEED OF THE WOLF!
THROOM!
DO NOT THINK, THUNDER GOD, THAT MY SIZE MEANS I AM WITHOUT SPEED.
I AM QUICK ENOUGH TO BE THY DEATH!
WHRRAPP!
OWWW!
AS I WAS THE BANE OF YOUR THIEVING UNCLES!


KRUUCNCH!
UGGH!
TRULY HIS STRENGTH BEGGARS DESCRIPTION!
I AM LOATH TO DO IT, BUT ONLY THE UNFETTERED MIGHT OF THE GOD OF THUNDER MAY SERVE HERE!
THOUGH YOU ARE THE OLDEST OF ALL WHO LIVE, THERE ARE NEWER POWERS IN THE WORLD, THAT EVEN THE OLDEST SHOULD BEWARE OF.
NOW LET MY HAMMER BURN WITH THE MIGHT OF A THOUSAND SUNS, ENERGY ENOUGH TO DESTROY EVEN THE DEMON OF THE FLAME!
AS I WHIRL MJOLNIR FASTER THAN THE SPEED OF THOUGHT TILL THE VERY AIR AROUND IT IGNITES IN BLAZING FURY!
HAVE AT YOU, SURTUR!


A WORTHY EFFORT, THUNDERER! ONE THAT DOES CREDIT TO SUCH A LITTLE GODLING.
BUT I WIELD THE UNSHEATHED SWORD, TWILIGHT, FORGED IN THE HEART OF THE BURNING GALAXY!
AND NO MERE HAMMER, HOWEVER ENCHANTED, CAN DULL ITS EDGE OR BREAK THROUGH ITS GUARD!
SCHRANGG!
WHAAM NNNNN!
A PITY YOU DO NOT CARRY SUCH A SWORD!
HAHAHAHAHAHAHAH!!
AND NOW THE ETERNAL FLAME IS WITHIN MY GRASP AFTER ALL THESE MILLENNIA!


WHA--!
THE GATES OF THE CITY EXPLODE BEFORE MY VERY EYES!
AND THERE, REVEALED BEHIND THE FIRE AND SMOKE, MY MOST HATED ENEMY.
ODIN! LORD OF ASGARD!
BACK, CREATURE OF EVIL!
AND THOUGH I COULD HAVE AIDED HIM, I BIDED MY TIME THAT YOU MIGHT EXPEND SUCH ENERGY AS YOU WOULD TO DEFEAT HIM...
...AND THEREBY WEAKEN THYSELF!
VALIANTLY HATH MY SON FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT! LONG SHALL IT BE REMEMBERED IN SONG AND STORY!
NOW, FOR MY SON, THOR, FOR MY BROTHERS, VILI AND VE, I STAND BETWEEN YOU AND THE ETERNAL FLAME OF ASGARD!
AND THOU SHALT PAY FOR EVERY DROP OF BLOOD SHED IN THY HIDEOUS CAUSE!

NEXT **RAGNAROK É RUIN!** 'NUFF SAID!

MARVEL
the mighty
THOR
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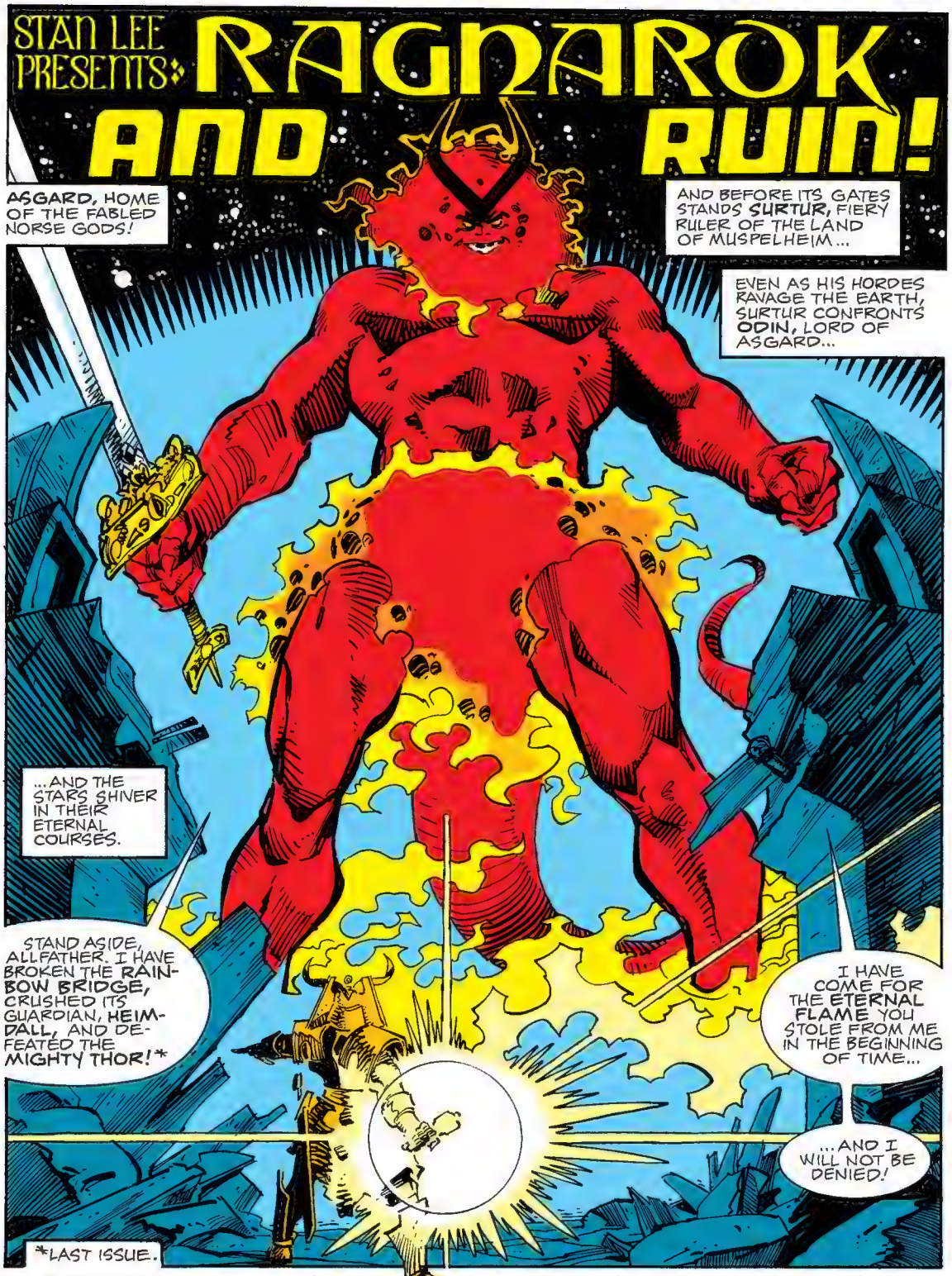
STAN LEE PRESENTS:
RAGNAROK AND RUIN!
ASGARD, HOME OF THE FABLED NORSE GODS!
AND BEFORE ITS GATES STANDS SURTUR, FIERY RULER OF THE LAND OF MUSPELHEIM...
EVEN AS HIS HORDES RAVAGE THE EARTH, SURTUR CONFRONTS ODIN, LORD OF ASGARD...
...AND THE STARS SHIVER IN THEIR ETERNAL COURSES.
STAND ASIDE, ALLFATHER. I HAVE BROKEN THE RAINBOW BRIDGE, CRUSHED ITS GUARDIAN, HEIMDALL, AND DEFEATED THE MIGHTY THOR!*
I HAVE COME FOR THE ETERNAL FLAME YOU STOLE FROM ME IN THE BEGINNING OF TIME...
...AND I WILL NOT BE DENIED!
*LAST ISSUE.

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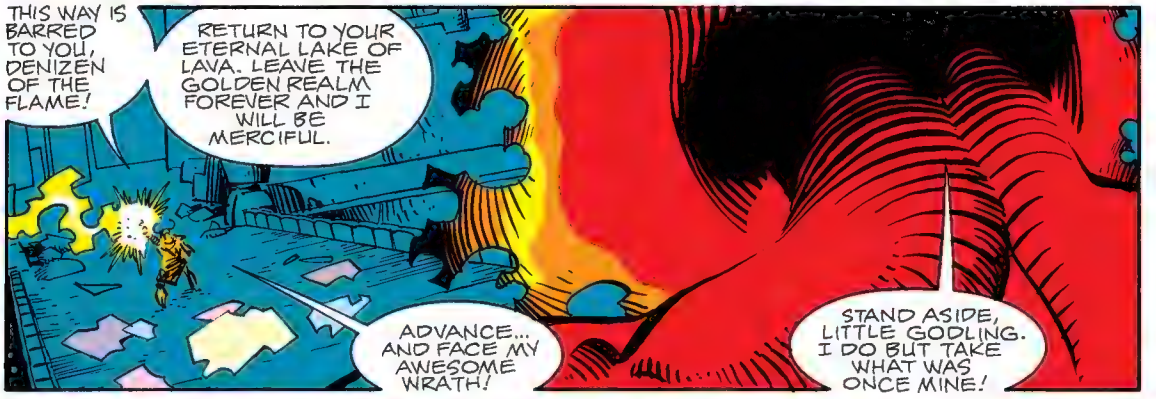
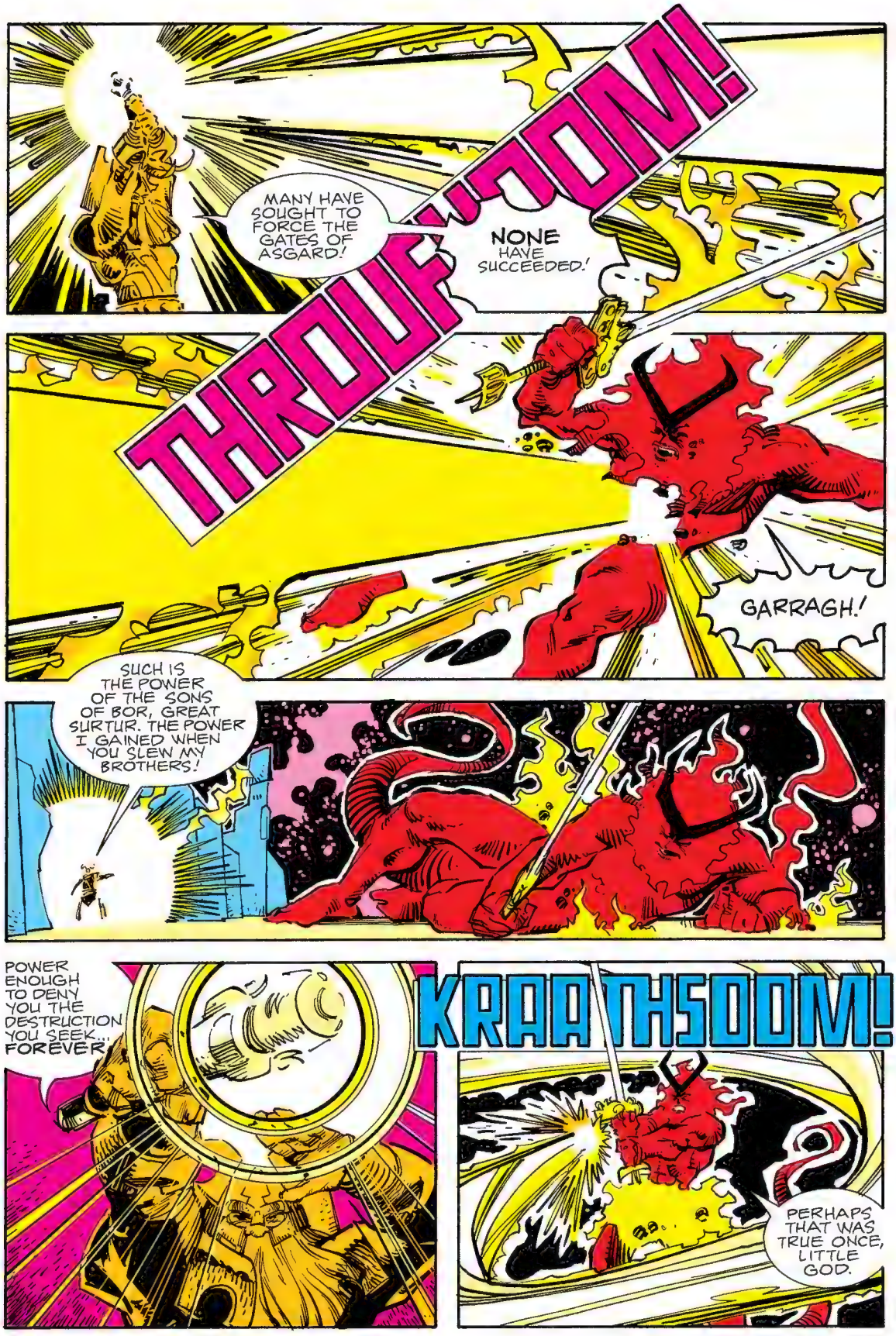
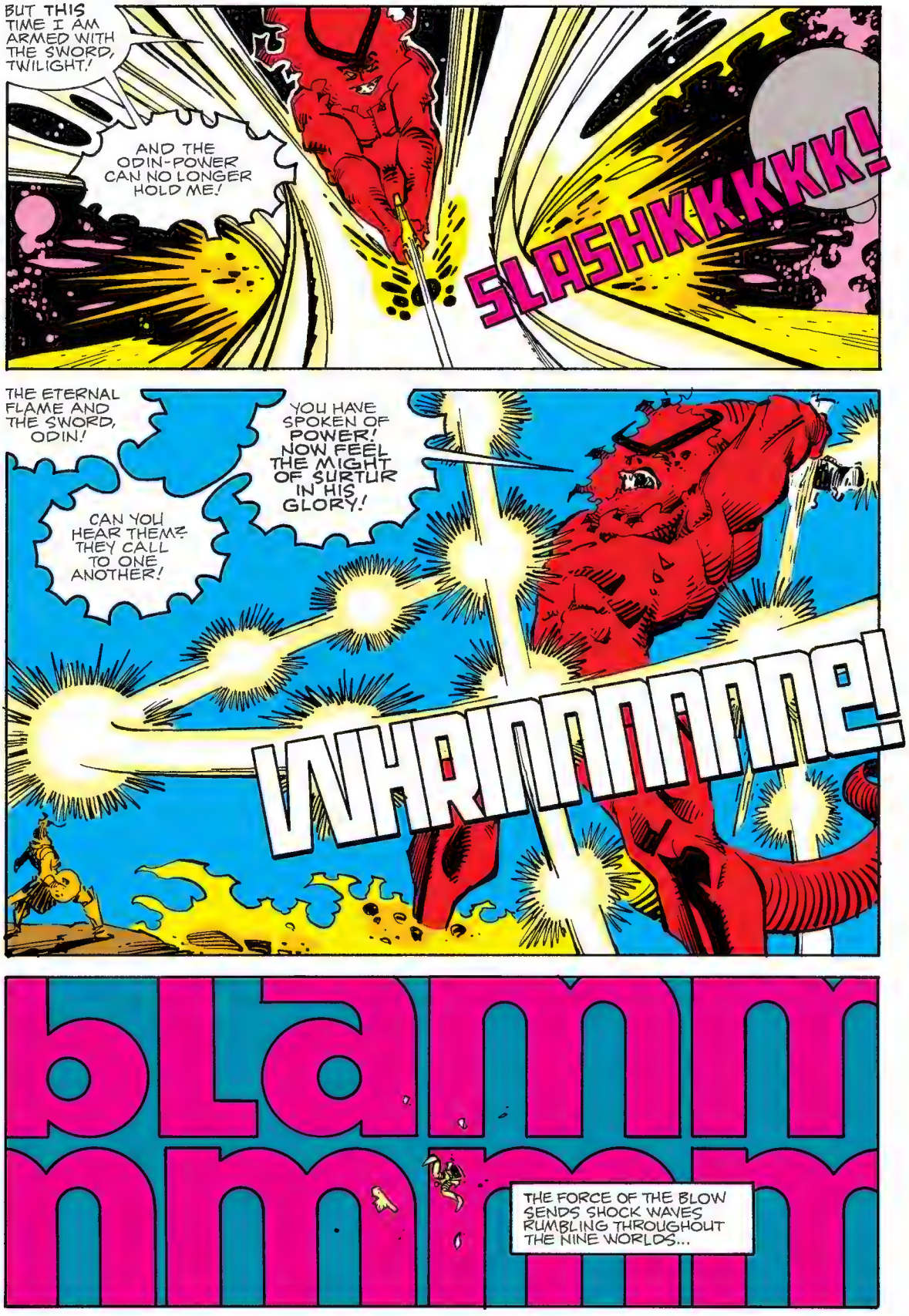
I KNEW YOU WERE COMING, SURTUR, WHEN THE LAST SEAT IN THE HEROES HALL OF VALHALLA WAS FILLED*.
... JUST AS I KNOW THAT YOU SEEK THE DESTRUCTION OF ALL THINGS.
*THOR# 345.
BUT THE TIME IS NOT YET RIPE. THE NORNS, DESTINY'S WEAVERS, HAVE NOT YET CUT THE THREAD OF LIFE.
WHAT CARE I FOR THE NORNS, OLD FOOL?
WHEN I AM FINISHED, THERE WILL BE NO DESTINY FOR THEM TO WEAVE.

YONDER STANDS THE ETERNAL FLAME AND ONCE I HAVE PLUNGED MY SWORD INTO ITS FIERY EMBRACE...
...I WILL SET THE UNIVERSE ALIGHT!
I SHALL DO WHAT I WAS BORN TO DO FROM THE BEGINNING OF TIME.

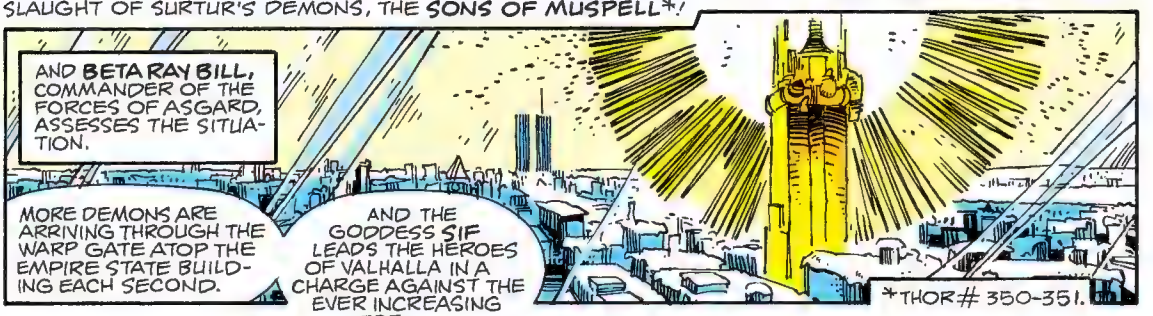

THIS WAY IS BARRED TO YOU, DENIZEN OF THE FLAME!
RETURN TO YOUR ETERNAL LAKE OF LAVA. LEAVE THE GOLDEN REALM FOREVER AND I WILL BE MERCIFUL.
ADVANCE... AND FACE MY AWESOME WRATH!
STAND ASIDE, LITTLE GODLING. I DO BUT TAKE WHAT WAS ONCE MINE!

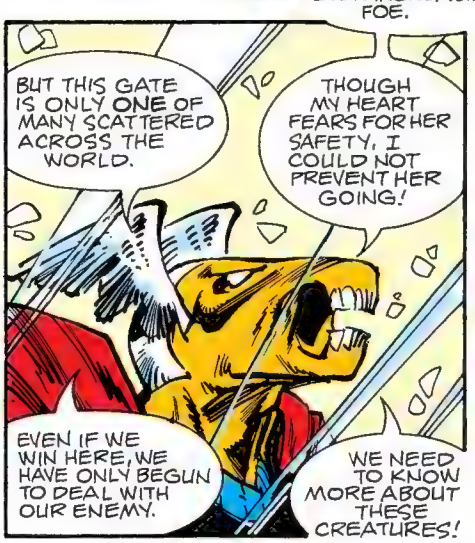
NOW, SO NEAR THE FLAME, MY FIRE BURNS BRIGHTER AND HOTTER WITH EVERY PASSING MOMENT!

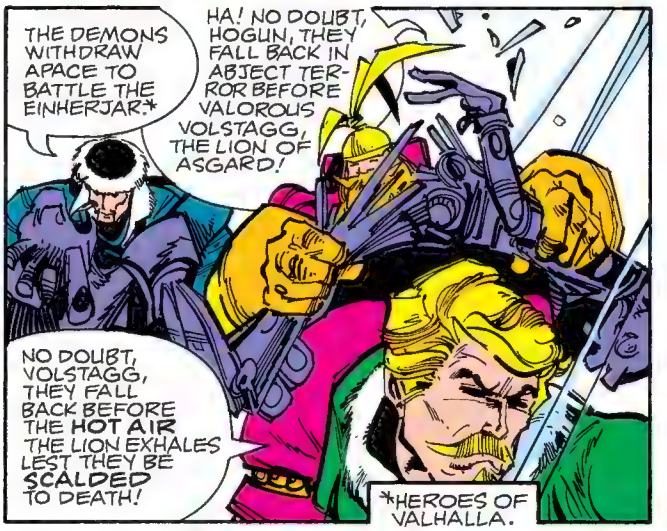

MANY HAVE SOUGHT TO FORCE THE GATES OF ASGARD!
NONE HAVE SUCCEEDED!
THROUF-DOOM!
GARRAGH!
SUCH IS THE POWER OF THE SONS OF BOR, GREAT SURTUR. THE POWER I GAINED WHEN YOU SLEW MY BROTHERS!
POWER ENOUGH TO DENY YOU THE DESTRUCTION YOU SEEK... FOREVER.
KRAATHSOOM!
PERHAPS THAT WAS TRUE ONCE, LITTLE GOD.

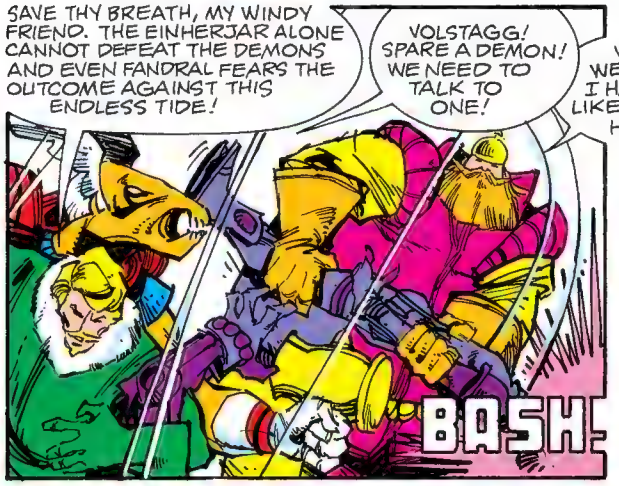

BUT THIS TIME I AM ARMED WITH THE SWORD, TWILIGHT!
AND THE ODIN-POWER CAN NO LONGER HOLD ME!
SLASHKKKKK!
THE ETERNAL FLAME AND THE SWORD, ODIN!
CAN YOU HEAR THEM? THEY CALL TO ONE ANOTHER!
YOU HAVE SPOKEN OF POWER! NOW FEEL THE MIGHT OF SURTUR IN HIS GLORY!
WHRIMMM

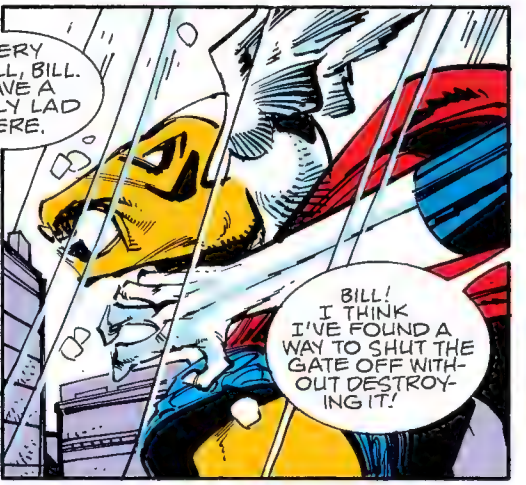
...BUT IN NEW YORK CITY, THE TREMBLING PASSES UNHEEDED AS THE CITY REELS BENEATH THE ONSLAUGHT OF SURTUR'S DEMONS, THE **SONS OF MUSPELL***!

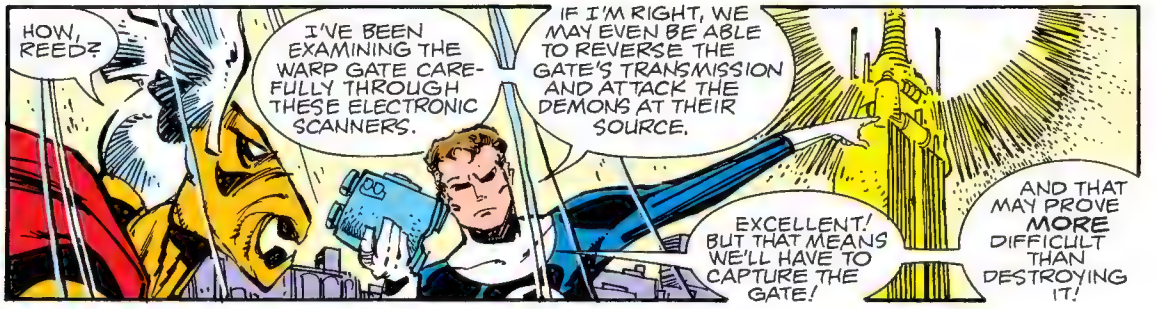

AND **BETA RAY BILL**, COMMANDER OF THE FORCES OF ASGARD, ASSESSES THE SITUATION.
MORE DEMONS ARE ARRIVING THROUGH THE WARP GATE ATOP THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING EACH SECOND.
AND THE GODDESS **SIF** LEADS THE HEROES OF VALHALLA IN A CHARGE AGAINST THE EVER INCREASING FOE.
*THOR # 350-351.

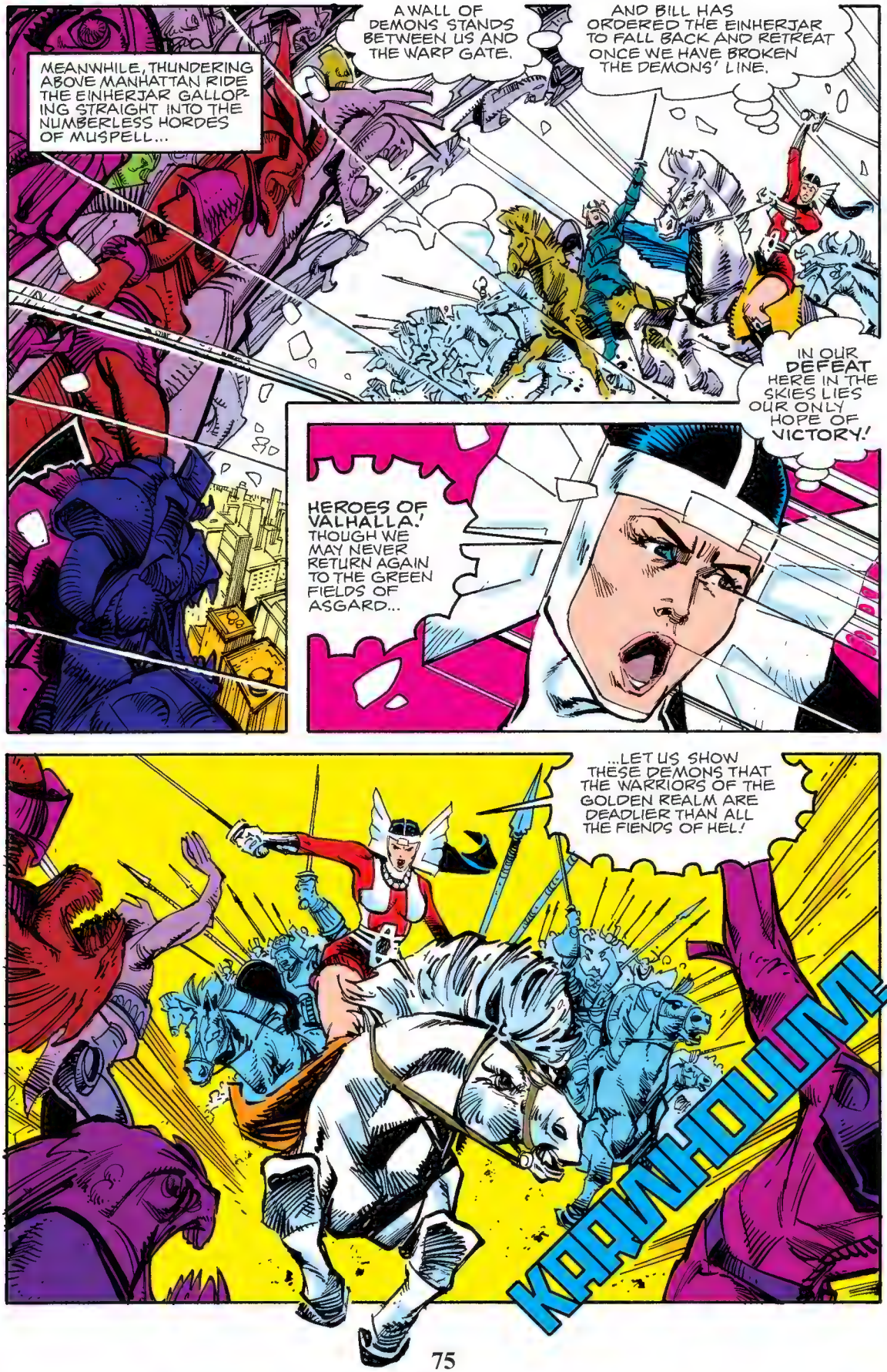

BUT THIS GATE IS ONLY **ONE** OF MANY SCATTERED ACROSS THE WORLD.
THOUGH MY HEART FEARS FOR HER SAFETY, I COULD NOT PREVENT HER GOING!
EVEN IF WE WIN HERE, WE HAVE ONLY BEGUN TO DEAL WITH OUR ENEMY.
WE NEED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THESE CREATURES!

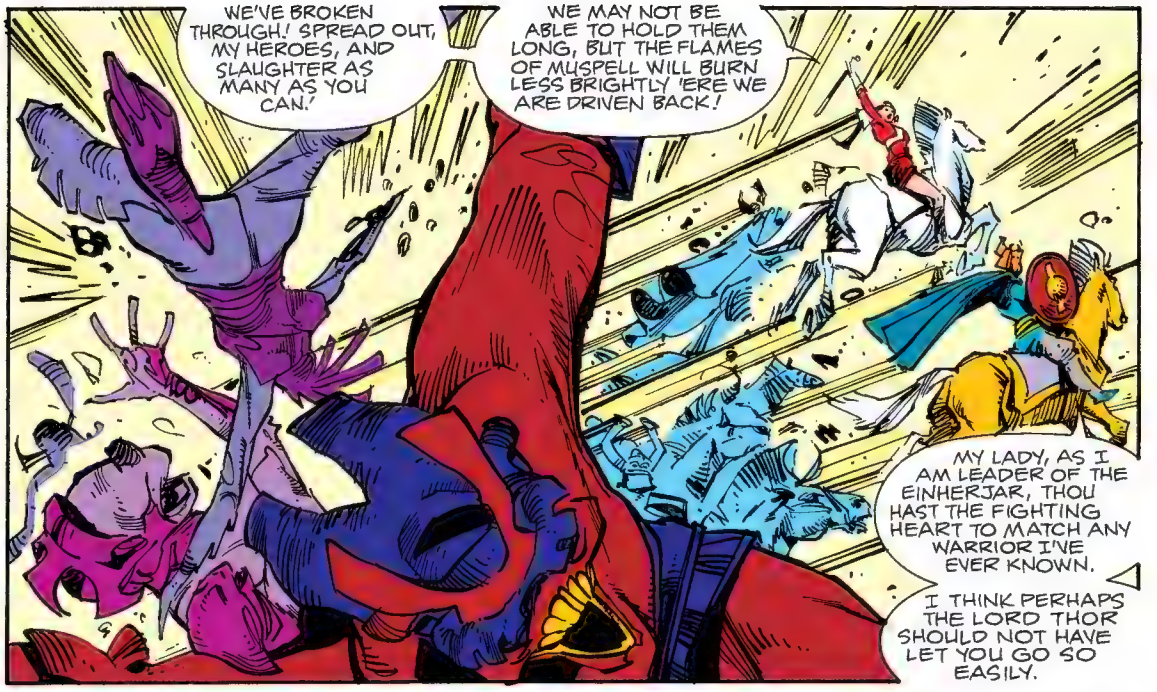

THE DEMONS WITHDRAW APACE TO BATTLE THE EINHERJAR.*
HA! NO DOUBT, HOGUN, THEY FALL BACK IN ABJECT TERROR BEFORE VALOROUS VOLSTAGG, THE LION OF ASGARD!
NO DOUBT, VOLSTAGG, THEY FALL BACK BEFORE THE **HOT AIR** THE LION EXHALES LEST THEY BE **SCALDED** TO DEATH!
*HEROES OF VALHALLA.


SAVE THY BREATH, MY WINDY FRIEND. THE EINHERJAR ALONE CANNOT DEFEAT THE DEMONS AND EVEN FANDRAL FEARS THE OUTCOME AGAINST THIS ENDLESS TIDE!
VOLSTAGG! SPARE A DEMON! WE NEED TO TALK TO ONE!
BASH!



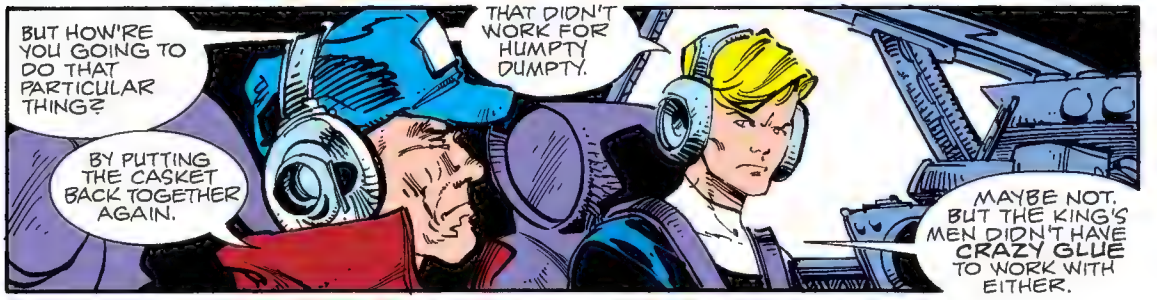

HOW, REED?
I'VE BEEN EXAMINING THE WARP GATE CAREFULLY THROUGH THESE ELECTRONIC SCANNERS.
IF I'M RIGHT, WE MAY EVEN BE ABLE TO REVERSE THE GATE'S TRANSMISSION AND ATTACK THE DEMONS AT THEIR SOURCE.
EXCELLENT! BUT THAT MEANS WE'LL HAVE TO CAPTURE THE GATE!
AND THAT MAY PROVE **MORE** DIFFICULT THAN DESTROYING IT!


MEANWHILE, THUNDERING ABOVE MANHATTAN RIDE THE EINHERJAR GALLOPING STRAIGHT INTO THE NUMBERLESS HORDES OF MUSPELL...
A WALL OF DEMONS STANDS BETWEEN US AND THE WARP GATE.
AND BILL HAS ORDERED THE EINHERJAR TO FALL BACK AND RETREAT ONCE WE HAVE BROKEN THE DEMONS' LINE.
IN OUR DEFEAT HERE IN THE SKIES LIES OUR ONLY HOPE OF VICTORY!
HEROES OF VALHALLA! THOUGH WE MAY NEVER RETURN AGAIN TO THE GREEN FIELDS OF ASGARD...
...LET US SHOW THESE DEMONS THAT THE WARRIORS OF THE GOLDEN REALM ARE DEADLIER THAN ALL THE FIENDS OF HEL!
KARVAKOUVE!


WE'VE BROKEN THROUGH! SPREAD OUT, MY HEROES, AND SLAUGHTER AS MANY AS YOU CAN!
WE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO HOLD THEM LONG, BUT THE FLAMES OF MUSPELL WILL BURN LESS BRIGHTLY 'ERE WE ARE DRIVEN BACK!
MY LADY, AS I AM LEADER OF THE EINHERJAR, THOU HAST THE FIGHTING HEART TO MATCH ANY WARRIOR I'VE EVER KNOWN.
I THINK PERHAPS THE LORD THOR SHOULD NOT HAVE LET YOU GO SO EASILY.

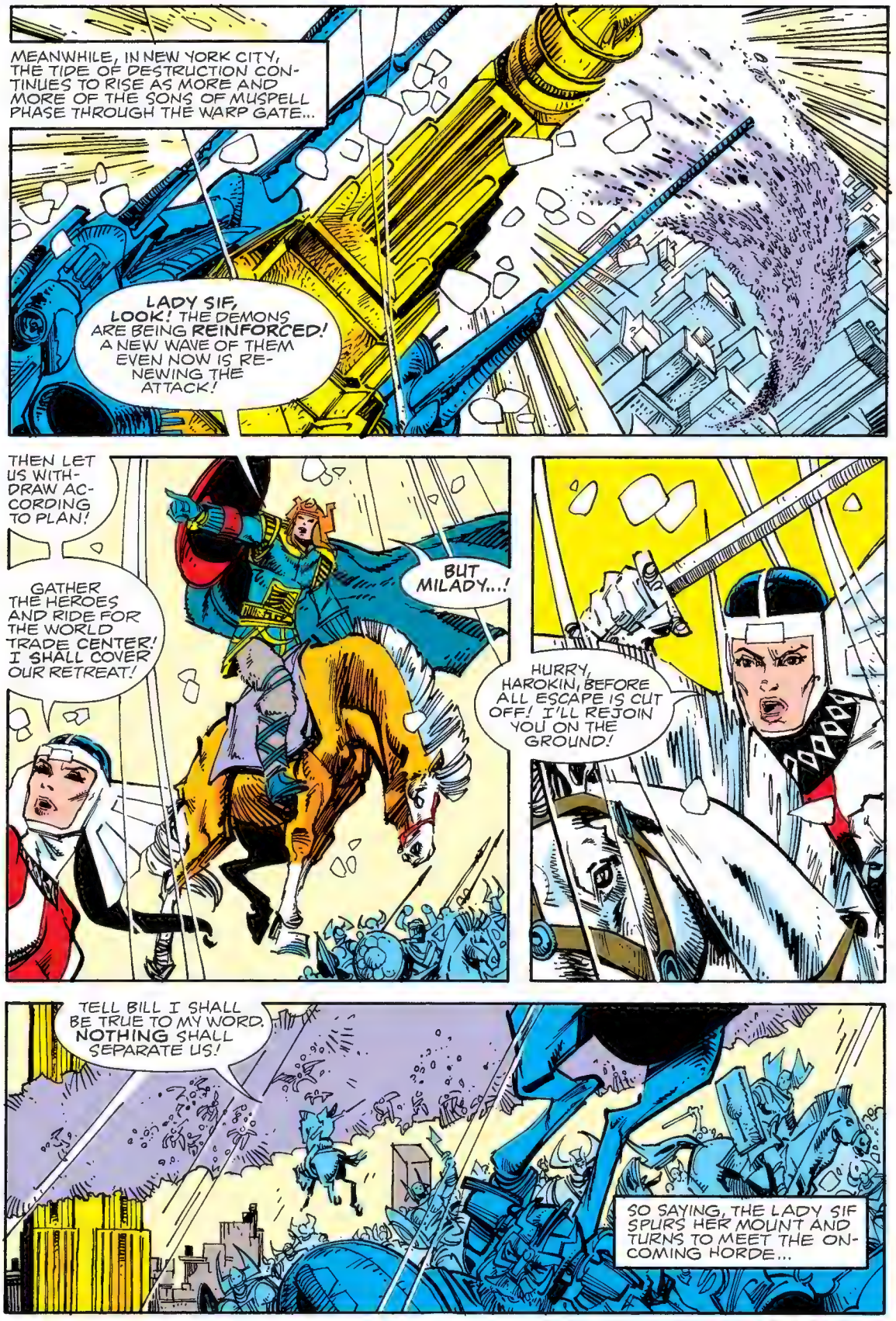
THOR IS TOO GENEROUS, HAROKIN, TO STAND BETWEEN ME AND MY DESIRES.
AND SO IS BILL. PERHAPS THAT IS WHY I CANNOT...
MILADY?
NOTHING. COME! LET US SHOW THESE CREATURES THAT THEY SHOULD NEVER HAVE LEFT THE LAND OF FIRE!

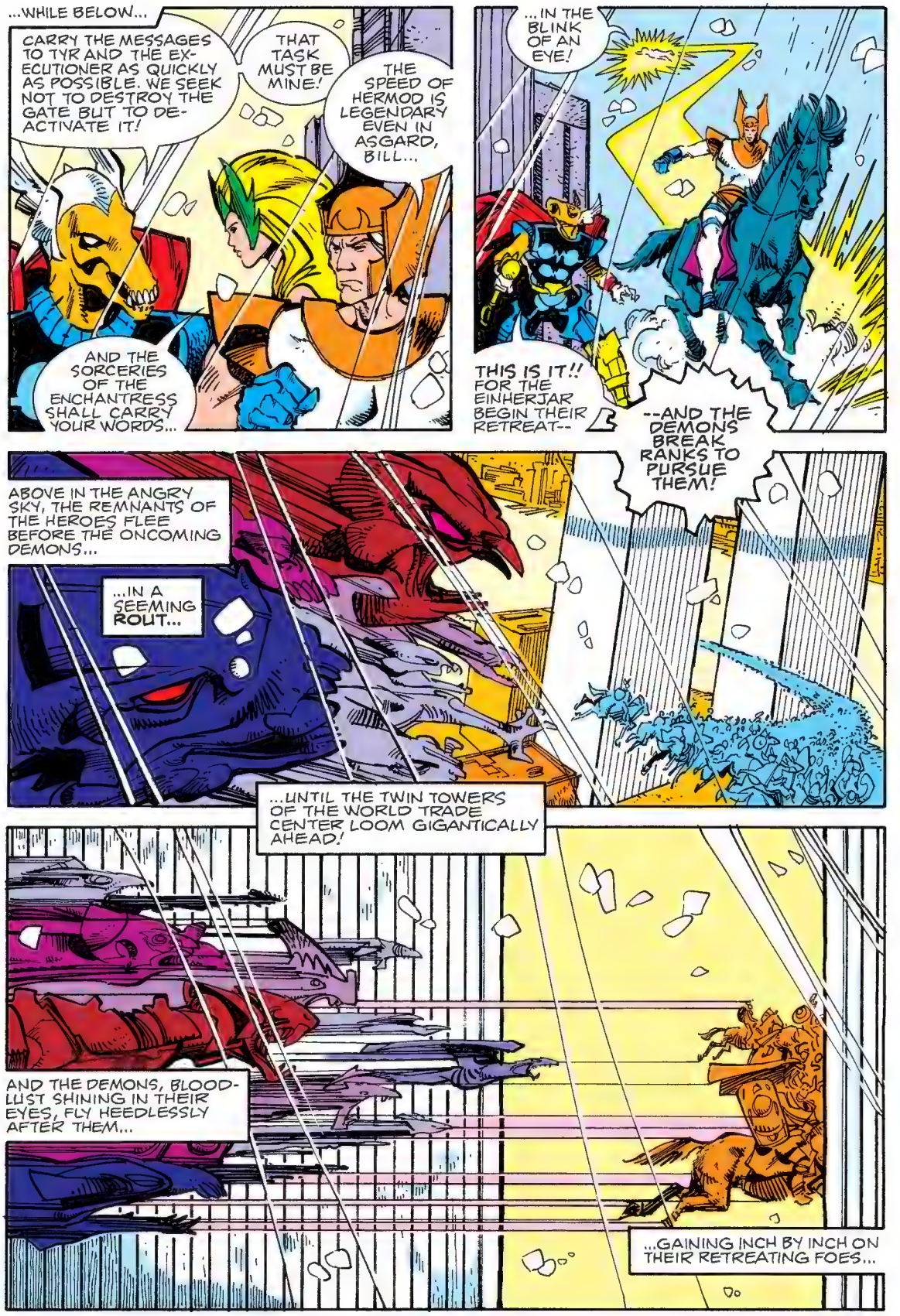
MEANWHILE, AS THE BATTLE ABOVE NEW YORK CITY RAGES, A SILENT CRAFT CARRYING JOHNNY STORM OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR AND ROGER WILLIS RACES ACROSS THE ATLANTIC HEADING FOR ENGLAND...
SO THAT'S THE STORY, JOHNNY.
THE ENTIRE EARTH IS CURRENTLY BLANKETED BY THESE WINTER STORMS CREATED WHEN THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS WAS BROKEN AND ITS MAGIC RELEASED.
THE STORMS HAMPER OUR DEFENSE AND AID THE DEMONS! AND IF WE CAN STOP THEM, WE'LL HAVE A BETTER CHANCE TO SAVE OURSELVES.


BUT HOW'RE YOU GOING TO DO THAT PARTICULAR THING?
BY PUTTING THE CASKET BACK TOGETHER AGAIN.
THAT DIDN'T WORK FOR HUMPTY DUMPTY.
MAYBE NOT. BUT THE KING'S MEN DIDN'T HAVE CRAZY GLUE TO WORK WITH EITHER.

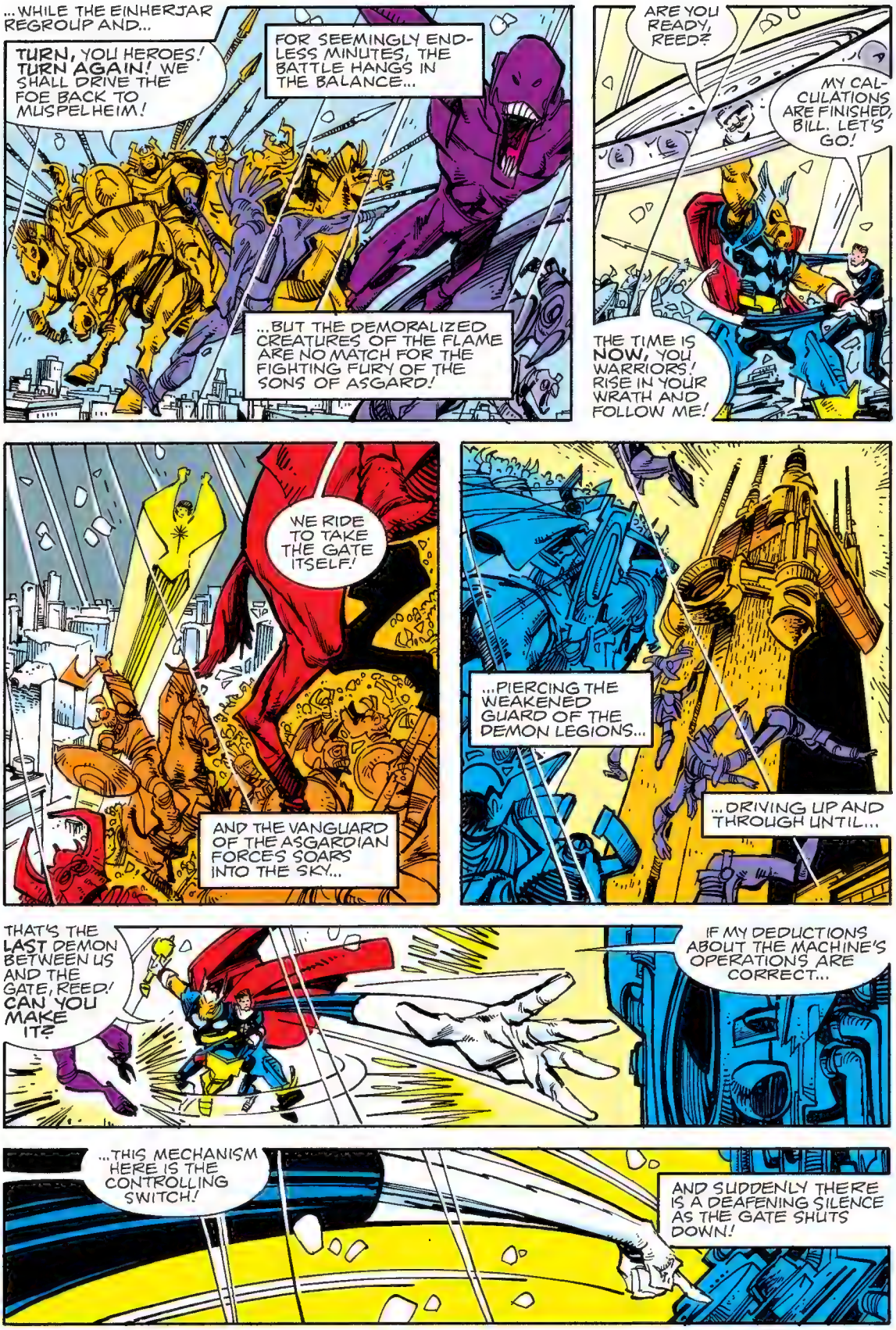
I THINK IF I CAN RECONSTRUCT THE CASKET FROM THE FRAGMENTS, ITS MAGICAL PROPERTIES WILL BE RECONSTITUTED.
SORT OF LIKE ORANGE JUICE?
THERE'S THE OPENING THOR BLASTED OUT OF FAERIELAND! THE FRAGMENTS OF THE CASKET SHOULD BE RIGHT BELOW IT.
LET'S HOPE ALL THE DARK ELVES ARE HIBERNATING!
BRRRRR. IT'S COLDER HERE THAN IN THE STATES.
FIGURES. WE'RE AT THE CENTER OF THE WHOLE WINTER STORM SYSTEM NOW.
I SEE WHY REED WANTED ME TO TAG ALONG WITH YOU. A FEW BURSTS OF NOVA FLAME AND WE OUGHT TO BE ABLE TO MELT OUR WAY INSIDE.
FA-THISSSSS!
MOMENTS LATER, AS THE TORCH BURNS HIS WAY THROUGH...
THE PIECES OF THE CASKET OUGHT TO LIE AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS PIT.
GO EASY, JOHNNY. WE ONLY WANT TO MELT THE ICE AROUND THE FRAGMENTS; NOT INCINERATE THEM.
EVEN THE AIR DOWN HERE FEELS LIKE IT'S FROZEN!

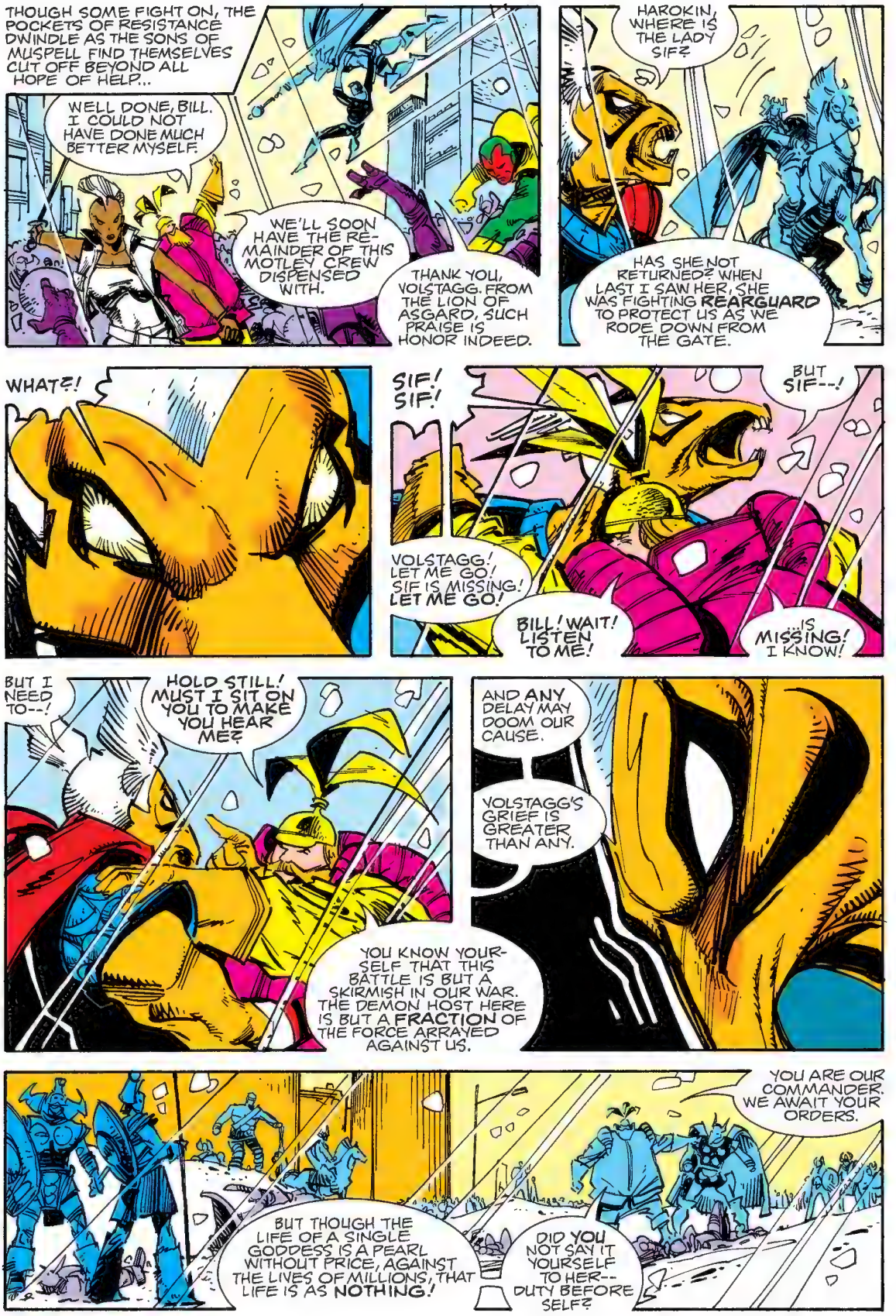
THIS IS IT, ROGER!
I CAN FEEL THE COLD RADIATING FROM HERE EVEN THROUGH MY FLAME!
THEN KEEP COOKING UNTIL I CAN GET SET UP. THE FASTER WE GET THE ICE MELTED, THE SOONER WE CAN GET STARTED.
I BROUGHT ALONG EVERYTHING I THOUGHT WE MIGHT NEED.
HEATING COILS, TWEEZERS, GLUE, AND MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL...
...SPECTACLES! NOW LET'S BEGIN.
HOW MUCH HEAT DO YOU WANT?
YOU'RE DOING FINE. THE ICE IS ROTTEN ENOUGH FOR ME TO START WORKING THE PIECES LOOSE.
YOU KNOW, I USED TO BE QUITE A HAND WITH PUZZLES WHEN I WAS A KID.
SLOWLY, LABORIOUSLY, ROGER BEGINS TO FIT TOGETHER THE FRAGMENTS THAT WERE ONCE THE ANCIENT CASKET...
THE COLD IS FEROCIOUS! ROGER MUST REALLY BE FREEZING!
SAY, DID YOU HEAR SOMETHING ABOVE US JUST THEN?
WHAT'S THAT?
UPSTAIRS. SOUNDS LIKE A SWARM OF ANGRY BEES. I'LL BE RIGHT BACK.
OKAY, BUT HURRY. IT'S CHILLY DOWN HERE!
I'LL JUST TAKE A QUICK LOOK AROUN--HOLY COW!
FLAME DEMONS!
THERE! A BEING OF LIVING FIRE!
TAKE HIM!
SWELL! MY NOVA BLASTS MUST HAVE ALERTED THEM, PROBABLY FROM SOME OTHER GATE NEARBY!
AND I CAN'T LET THEM FIND ROGER!

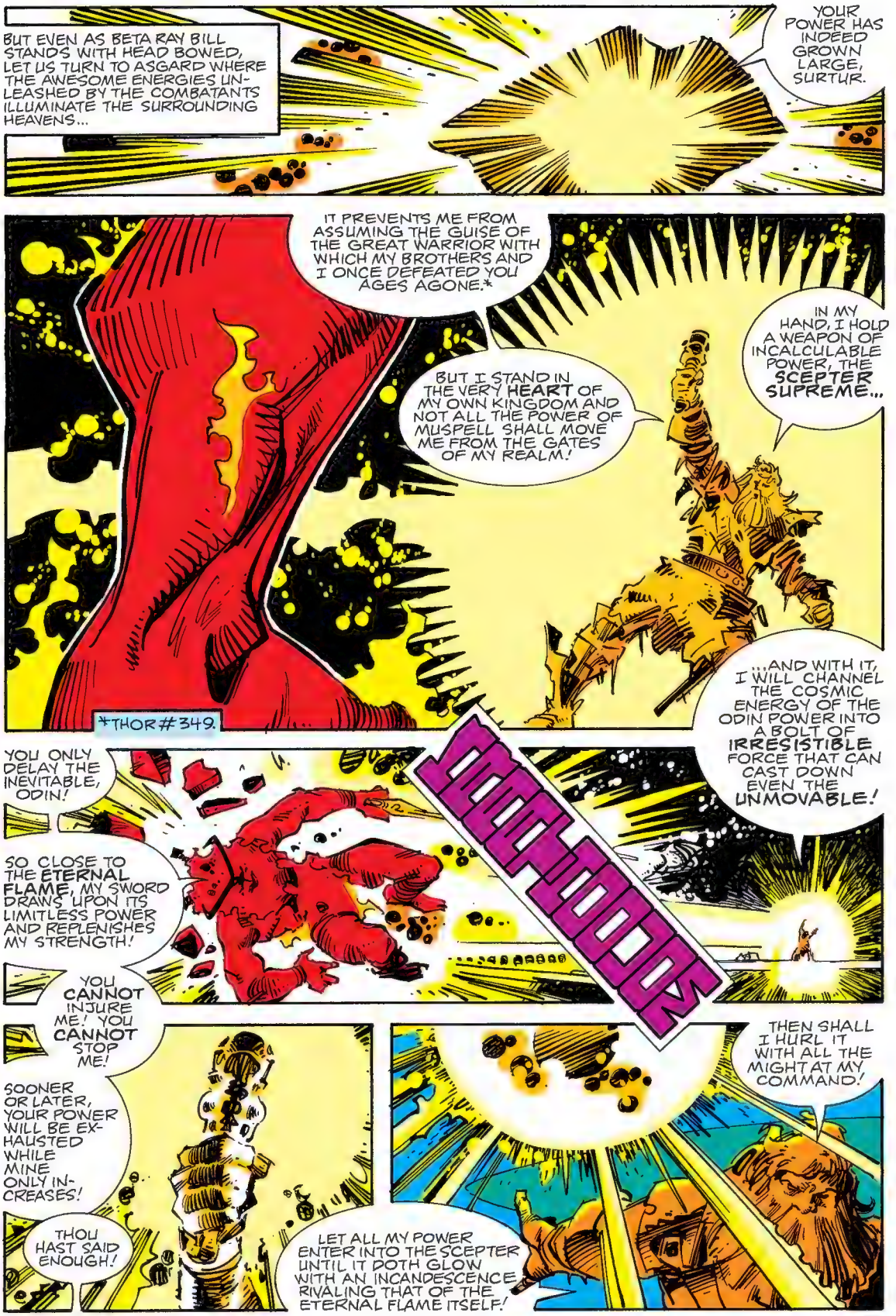

MEANWHILE, IN NEW YORK CITY, THE TIDE OF DESTRUCTION CONTINUES TO RISE AS MORE AND MORE OF THE SONS OF MUSPELL PHASE THROUGH THE WARP GATE...
LADY SIF, LOOK! THE DEMONS ARE BEING REINFORCED! A NEW WAVE OF THEM EVEN NOW IS RENEWING THE ATTACK!
THEN LET US WITHDRAW ACCORDING TO PLAN!
GATHER THE HEROES AND RIDE FOR THE WORLD TRADE CENTER! I SHALL COVER OUR RETREAT!
BUT MILADY...!
HURRY, HAROKIN, BEFORE ALL ESCAPE IS CUT OFF! I'LL REJOIN YOU ON THE GROUND!
TELL BILL I SHALL BE TRUE TO MY WORD. NOTHING SHALL SEPARATE US!
SO SAYING, THE LADY SIF SPURS HER MOUNT AND TURNS TO MEET THE ONCOMING HORDE...

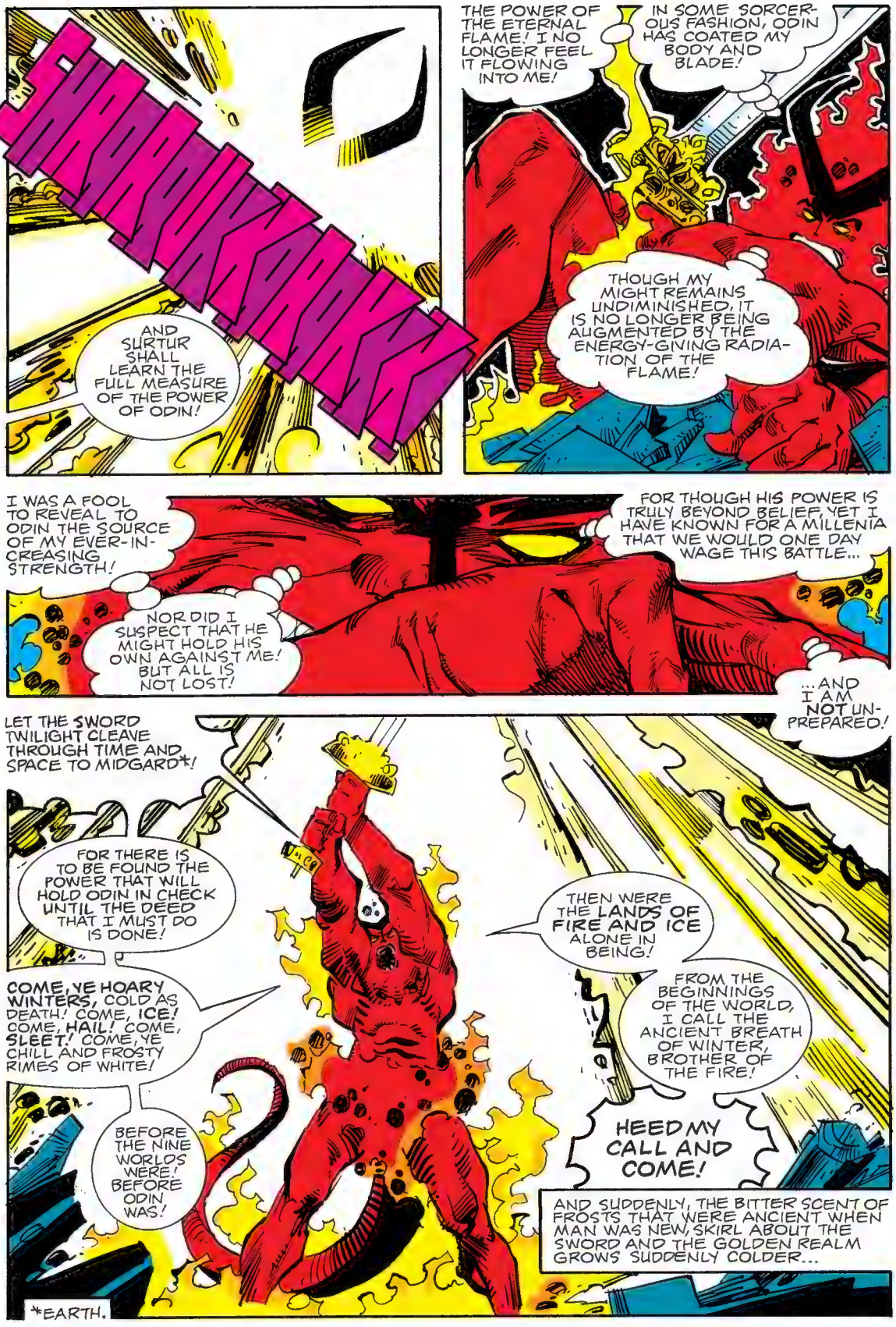

...WHILE BELOW...
CARRY THE MESSAGES TO TYR AND THE EXECUTIONER AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. WE SEEK NOT TO DESTROY THE GATE BUT TO DEACTIVATE IT!
THAT TASK MUST BE MINE!
THE SPEED OF HERMOD IS LEGENDARY EVEN IN ASGARD, BILL...
AND THE SORCERIES OF THE ENCHANTRESS SHALL CARRY YOUR WORDS...
...IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE!
THIS IS IT!! FOR THE EINHERJAR BEGIN THEIR RETREAT--
--AND THE DEMONS BREAK RANKS TO PURSUE THEM!
ABOVE IN THE ANGRY SKY, THE REMNANTS OF THE HEROES FLEE BEFORE THE ONCOMING DEMONS...
...IN A SEEMING ROUT...
...UNTIL THE TWIN TOWERS OF THE WORLD TRADE CENTER LOOM GIGANTICALLY AHEAD!
AND THE DEMONS, BLOODLUST SHINING IN THEIR EYES, FLY HEEDLESSLY AFTER THEM...
...GAINING INCH BY INCH ON THEIR RETREATING FOES...

...WHEN SUDDENLY...
THE SURPRISE IS OURS! FORWARD ON THE LEFT, ASGARDIANS! THE GOD OF WAR COMMANDS!
FORWARD ON THE RIGHT, YOU SCUM! TYR SHALL NOT HAVE ALL THE GLORY! THE EXECUTIONER'S BLADE WILL SING AS NEVER BEFORE!
FOR ASGARD!
FOR ODIN!
FOR THE GOLDEN REALM!
LET NOT A DEMON SURVIVE!
AND FROM BEHIND EACH TOWER, HIDDEN BY THE O'ERSHADOWING BULK OF THE TALLEST BUILDINGS IN NEW YORK CITY, THE REMAINING FORCES OF ASGARD ARE COMMITTED TO THE FINAL BATTLE AGAINST THE SONS OF MUSPELL...
BEWARE! WE HAVE FALLEN INTO A TRAP!
KARASSSHH!!


...WHILE THE EINHERJAR REGROUP AND...
TURN, YOU HEROES! TURN AGAIN! WE SHALL DRIVE THE FOE BACK TO MUSPELHEIM!
FOR SEEMINGLY END-LESS MINUTES, THE BATTLE HANGS IN THE BALANCE...
...BUT THE DEMORALIZED CREATURES OF THE FLAME ARE NO MATCH FOR THE FIGHTING FURY OF THE SONS OF ASGARD!
ARE YOU READY, REED?
MY CAL-CULATIONS ARE FINISHED, BILL. LET'S GO!
THE TIME IS NOW, YOU WARRIORS! RISE IN YOUR WRATH AND FOLLOW ME!
WE RIDE TO TAKE THE GATE ITSELF!
AND THE VANGUARD OF THE ASGARDIAN FORCES SOARS INTO THE SKY...
...PIERCING THE WEAKENED GUARD OF THE DEMON LEGIONS...
...DRIVING UP AND THROUGH UNTIL...
THAT'S THE LAST DEMON BETWEEN US AND THE GATE, REED! CAN YOU MAKE IT?
IF MY DEDUCTIONS ABOUT THE MACHINE'S OPERATIONS ARE CORRECT...
...THIS MECHANISM HERE IS THE CONTROLLING SWITCH!
AND SUDDENLY THERE IS A DEAFENING SILENCE AS THE GATE SHUTS DOWN!


THOUGH SOME FIGHT ON, THE POCKETS OF RESISTANCE DWINDLE AS THE SONS OF MUSPELL FIND THEMSELVES CUT OFF BEYOND ALL HOPE OF HELP...
WELL DONE, BILL. I COULD NOT HAVE DONE MUCH BETTER MYSELF.
WE'LL SOON HAVE THE REMAINDER OF THIS MOTLEY CREW DISPENSED WITH.
THANK YOU, VOLSTAGG. FROM THE LION OF ASGARD, SUCH PRAISE IS HONOR INDEED.
HAROKIN, WHERE IS THE LADY SIF?
HAS SHE NOT RETURNED? WHEN LAST I SAW HER, SHE WAS FIGHTING REARGUARD TO PROTECT US AS WE RODE DOWN FROM THE GATE.
WHAT?!
SIF! SIF!
BUT SIF--!
VOLSTAGG! LET ME GO! SIF IS MISSING! LET ME GO!
BILL! WAIT! LISTEN TO ME!
IS MISSING! I KNOW!
BUT I NEED TO--!
HOLD STILL! MUST I SIT ON YOU TO MAKE YOU HEAR ME?
AND ANY DELAY MAY DOOM OUR CAUSE.
VOLSTAGG'S GRIEF IS GREATER THAN ANY.
YOU KNOW YOURSELF THAT THIS BATTLE IS BUT A SKIRMISH IN OUR WAR. THE DEMON HOST HERE IS BUT A FRACTION OF THE FORCE ARRAYED AGAINST US.
YOU ARE OUR COMMANDER. WE AWAIT YOUR ORDERS.
BUT THOUGH THE LIFE OF A SINGLE GODDESS IS A PEARL WITHOUT PRICE, AGAINST THE LIVES OF MILLIONS, THAT LIFE IS AS NOTHING!
DID YOU NOT SAY IT YOURSELF TO HER-- DUTY BEFORE SELF?

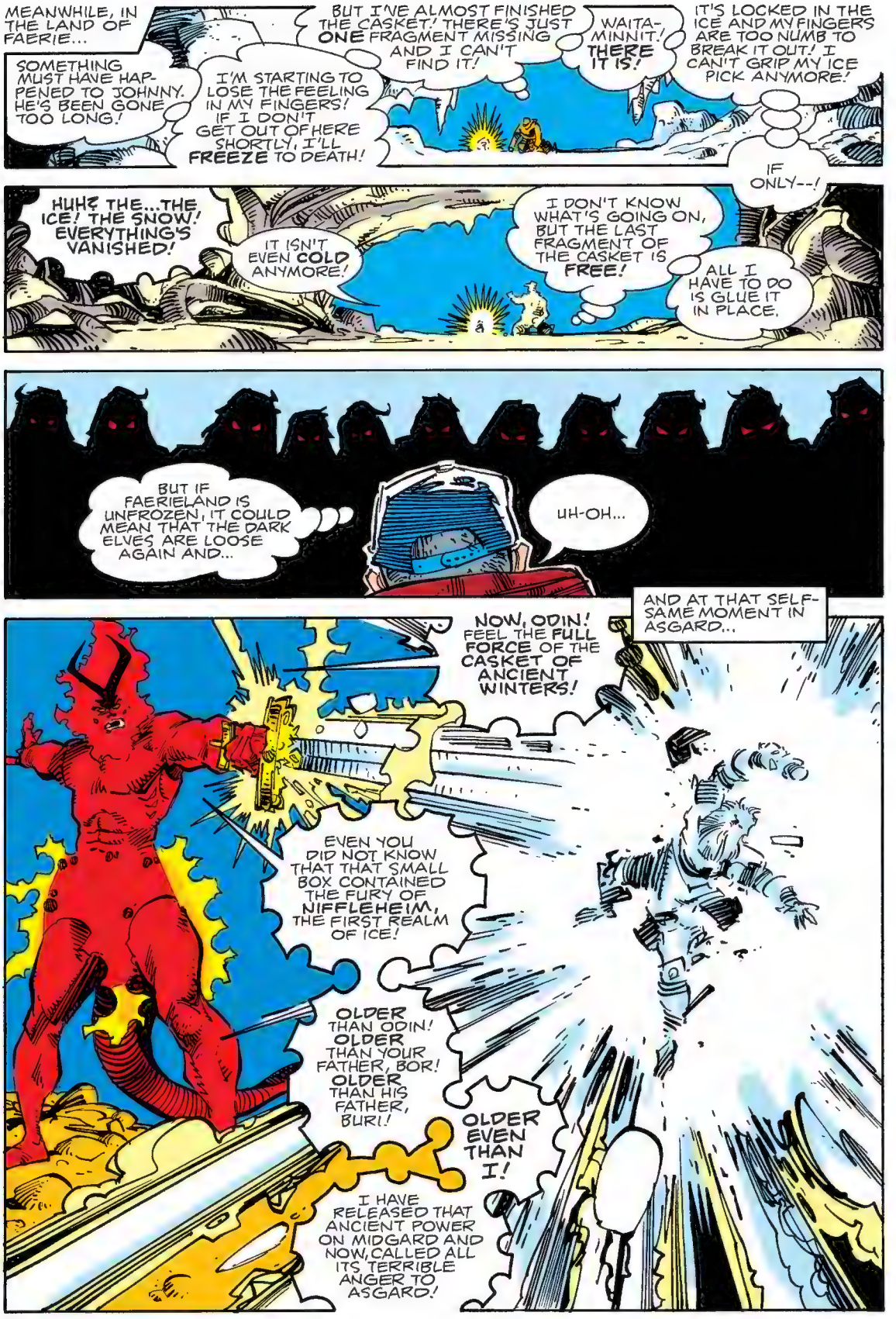

BUT EVEN AS BETA RAY BILL STANDS WITH HEAD BOWED, LET US TURN TO ASGARD WHERE THE AWESOME ENERGIES UNLEASHED BY THE COMBATANTS ILLUMINATE THE SURROUNDING HEAVENS...
YOUR POWER HAS INDEED GROWN LARGE, SURTUR.
IT PREVENTS ME FROM ASSUMING THE GUISE OF THE GREAT WARRIOR WITH WHICH MY BROTHERS AND I ONCE DEFEATED YOU AGES AGONE.*
BUT I STAND IN THE VERY HEART OF MY OWN KINGDOM AND NOT ALL THE POWER OF MUSPELL SHALL MOVE ME FROM THE GATES OF MY REALM!
IN MY HAND, I HOLD A WEAPON OF INCALCULABLE POWER, THE SCEPTER SUPREME...
*THOR #349.
...AND WITH IT, I WILL CHANNEL THE COSMIC ENERGY OF THE ODIN POWER INTO A BOLT OF IRRESISTIBLE FORCE THAT CAN CAST DOWN EVEN THE UNMOVABLE!
KRAKOOM
YOU ONLY DELAY THE INEVITABLE, ODIN!
SO CLOSE TO THE ETERNAL FLAME, MY SWORD DRAWS UPON ITS LIMITLESS POWER AND REPLENISHES MY STRENGTH!
YOU CANNOT INJURE ME! YOU CANNOT STOP ME!
SOONER OR LATER, YOUR POWER WILL BE EXHAUSTED WHILE MINE ONLY INCREASES!
THOU HAST SAID ENOUGH!
LET ALL MY POWER ENTER INTO THE SCEPTER UNTIL IT DOTH GLOW WITH AN INCANDESCENCE RIVALING THAT OF THE ETERNAL FLAME ITSELF!
THEN SHALL I HURL IT WITH ALL THE MIGHT AT MY COMMAND!


KRAKKKKKK!
AND SURTUR SHALL LEARN THE FULL MEASURE OF THE POWER OF ODIN!
THE POWER OF THE ETERNAL FLAME! I NO LONGER FEEL IT FLOWING INTO ME!
IN SOME SORCEROUS FASHION, ODIN HAS COATED MY BODY AND BLADE!
THOUGH MY MIGHT REMAINS UNDIMINISHED, IT IS NO LONGER BEING AUGMENTED BY THE ENERGY-GIVING RADIATION OF THE FLAME!
I WAS A FOOL TO REVEAL TO ODIN THE SOURCE OF MY EVER-INCREASING STRENGTH!
NOR DID I SUSPECT THAT HE MIGHT HOLD HIS OWN AGAINST ME! BUT ALL IS NOT LOST!
FOR THOUGH HIS POWER IS TRULY BEYOND BELIEF, YET I HAVE KNOWN FOR A MILLENIA THAT WE WOULD ONE DAY WAGE THIS BATTLE...
...AND I AM NOT UNPREPARED!
LET THE SWORD TWILIGHT CLEAVE THROUGH TIME AND SPACE TO MIDGARD*!
FOR THERE IS TO BE FOUND THE POWER THAT WILL HOLD ODIN IN CHECK UNTIL THE DEED THAT I MUST DO IS DONE!
COME, YE HOARY WINTERS, COLD AS DEATH! COME, ICE! COME, HAIL! COME, SLEET! COME, YE CHILL AND FROSTY RIMES OF WHITE!
BEFORE THE NINE WORLDS WERE! BEFORE ODIN WAS!
THEN WERE THE LANDS OF FIRE AND ICE ALONE IN BEING!
FROM THE BEGINNINGS OF THE WORLD, I CALL THE ANCIENT BREATH OF WINTER, BROTHER OF THE FIRE!
HEED MY CALL AND COME!
AND SUDDENLY, THE BITTER SCENT OF FROSTS THAT WERE ANCIENT WHEN MAN WAS NEW, SKIRL ABOUT THE SWORD AND THE GOLDEN REALM GROWS SUDDENLY COLDER...
*EARTH.

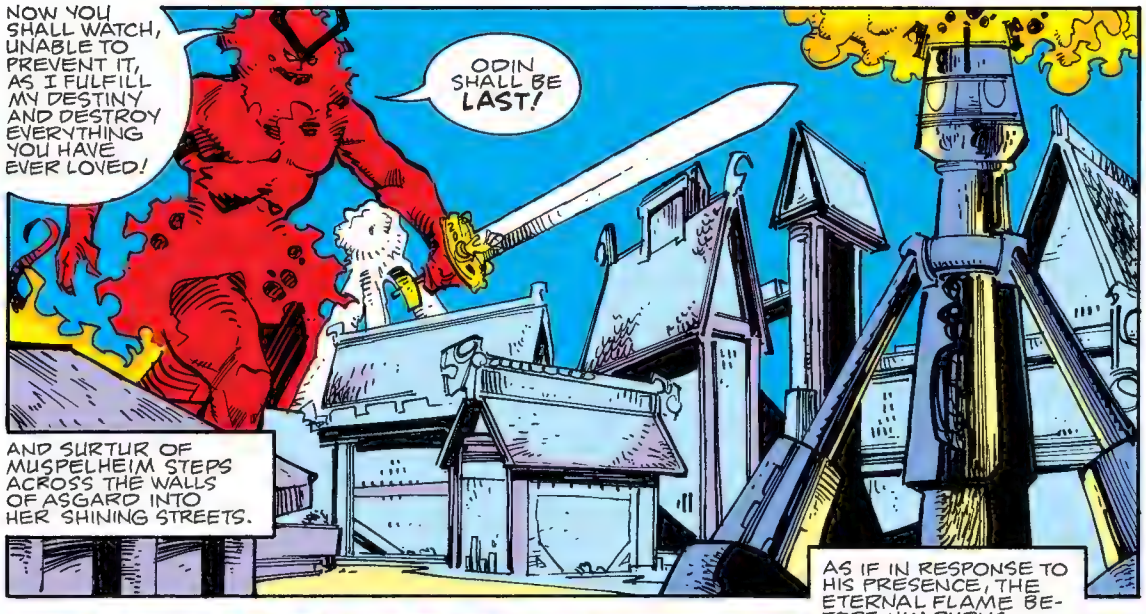
...A CHILL FELT EVEN IN A DISTANT CORNER OF ASGARD...
...WHERE ODIN'S WIFE FRIGGA AND THE CHILDREN OF THE GODS CONFRONT A DEADLY TROLL BEFORE THE BRIDGE ABOVE THE ENDLESS CHASM.
FEED ME A YOUNGLING AND I LET YOU PASS!
OR YOU ALL DIE NOW!
YOU GUYS KEEP HIM OCCUPIED, LEIF!
GUNNHILD! WAIT! WHERE DO YOU--!
HROLF! ARNGRIM! BOOST ME UP! I'VE GOT AN IDEA!
WHAT'S SHE DOING?
I DON'T KNOW, BUT WE BETTER DISTRACT THE TROLL FAST!
HUH?
HEY, UGLY! WHERE WERE YOU WHEN ODIN HANDED OUT THE BRAINS?
WHAT?
thukk!
IS THAT A NOSE OR ARE YOU TROLLS GROWING TOMATOES OUT OF SEASON?
WHY YOU--!
WHY DOES IT TAKE FOUR TROLLS TO LOSE WEIGHT?
ARRGH!
WRONG! TWO TO HOLD HIM DOWN AND ONE TO CUT OFF HIS HEAD!
PERFECT, GUYS! HE'S FORGOTTEN ALL ABOUT ME!
SCRITHH!
BUT NOT FOR LONG!

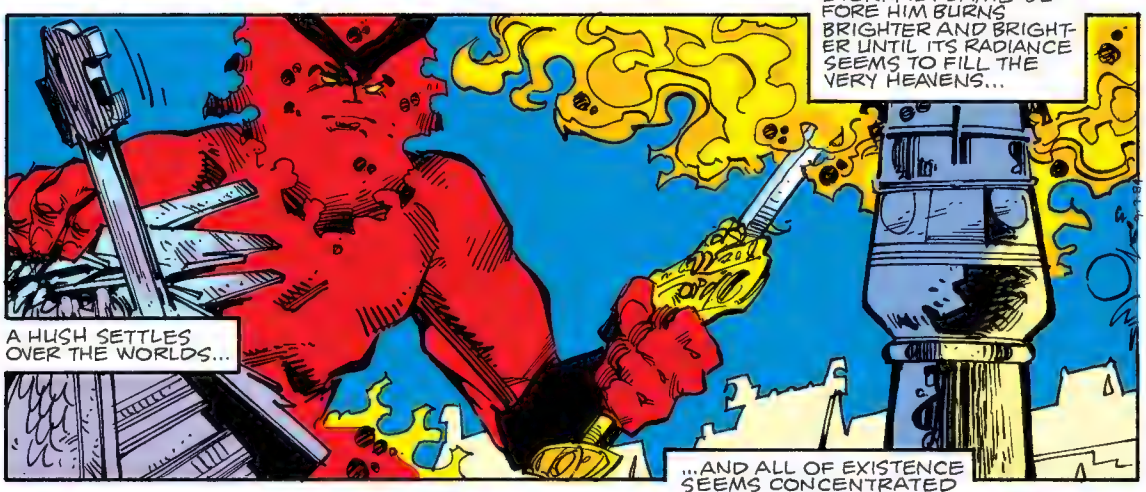
EVEN AS HILDY BEGINS TO MOVE STEALTHILY CLOSER TO THE TROLL'S BACKSIDE, ON EARTH WE FIND...
THE DEMON VOLSTAGG TRIED TO PERSUADE TO TALK IS... TEMPORARILY INDISPOSED.
HOGUN AND I HAVE FOUND ANOTHER ONE.
GOOD! WE NEED TO KNOW HOW THESE CREATURES ARE ARRIVING ON EARTH IF WE ARE TO STOP THEM!
I'LL NEVER TALK!
THEN PERHAPS WE'LL BEGIN BY RIPPING YOUR TONGUE LOOSE FROM YOUR FILTHY MOUTH AND SEEING IF IT CAN WAG ON ITS OWN!
THE GATE! THE GATE! WE CAME THROUGH THE MAIN GATE FROM MUSPELHEIM TO THE GREAT DESERT!
AND DO I WISH I WAS BACK THERE RIGHT NOW!
AND SO...
HOW GOES IT, REED?
I'M NEARLY FINISHED. THE MATTER TRANSMISSION DEVICES ARE FAIRLY CRUDE AND I'VE BEEN ABLE TO REVERSE THEM WITHOUT DIFFICULTY.
ONCE ACTIVATED AGAIN, THE GATE SHOULD SEND YOU THROUGH TO THE DEMONS' SOURCE.
RIGHT INTO THE HEART OF THE ENEMY.
AFTER THAT, YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN.
I'LL REMAIN HERE AND MONITOR THE GATE TO BE SURE IT OPERATES CORRECTLY.
THEN START IT UP AND WE'LL BE ON OUR WAY.
ATTEND MY WORDS, ASGARDIANS!
THOUGH WE HAVE WON THE BATTLE HERE, BEFORE US LIES THE FINAL STRUGGLE!
WE MUST DESTROY THE GREAT GATE AND WITH IT, MUSPELHEIM'S DIRECT LINK WITH EARTH!
LET THE HOSTS BE ORDERED!
AND FOLLOW ME!
AND WITH A CHEER, THE FORCES OF ASGARD MOUNT INTO THE SKY AND THROUGH THE GLOWING GATEWAY ATOP THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING...

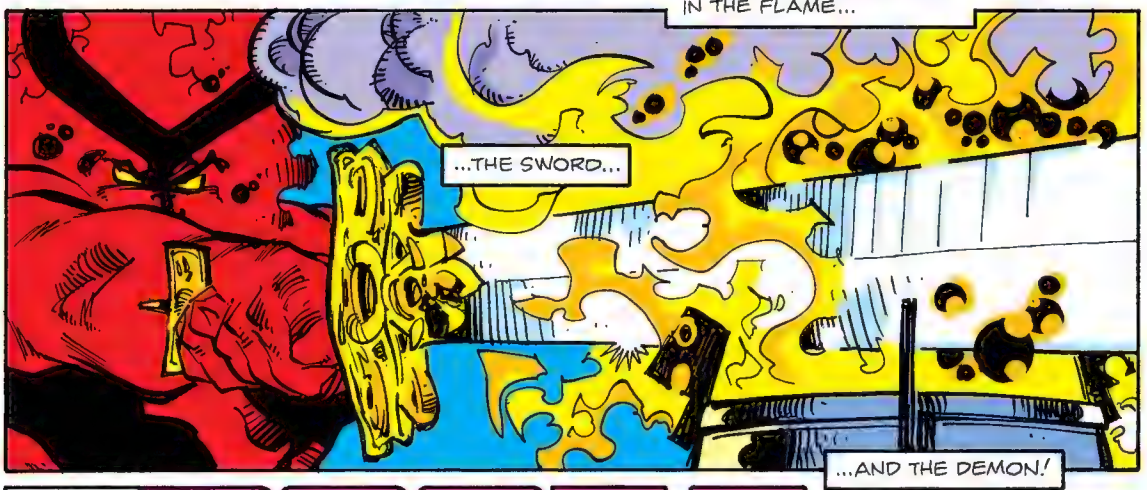
...TO EMERGE INTO THE HEART OF THE SAHARA DESERT...
...AND INTO A SEEMINGLY ENDLESS SEA OF DEMONS!
UH-OH!


MEANWHILE, IN THE LAND OF FAERIE...
SOMETHING MUST HAVE HAPPENED TO JOHNNY. HE'S BEEN GONE TOO LONG!
I'M STARTING TO LOSE THE FEELING IN MY FINGERS! IF I DON'T GET OUT OF HERE SHORTLY, I'LL FREEZE TO DEATH!
BUT I'VE ALMOST FINISHED THE CASKET! THERE'S JUST ONE FRAGMENT MISSING AND I CAN'T FIND IT!
WAITA-MINNIT! THERE IT IS!
IT'S LOCKED IN THE ICE AND MY FINGERS ARE TOO NUMB TO BREAK IT OUT! I CAN'T GRIP MY ICE PICK ANYMORE!
IF ONLY--!
HUH? THE...THE ICE! THE SNOW! EVERYTHING'S VANISHED!
IT ISN'T EVEN COLD ANYMORE!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON, BUT THE LAST FRAGMENT OF THE CASKET IS FREE!
ALL I HAVE TO DO IS GLUE IT IN PLACE.
BUT IF FAERIELAND IS UNFROZEN, IT COULD MEAN THAT THE DARK ELVES ARE LOOSE AGAIN AND...
UH-OH...
AND AT THAT SELF-SAME MOMENT IN ASGARD...
NOW, ODIN! FEEL THE FULL FORCE OF THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS!
EVEN YOU DID NOT KNOW THAT THAT SMALL BOX CONTAINED THE FURY OF NIFFLEHEIM, THE FIRST REALM OF ICE!
OLDER THAN ODIN! OLDER THAN YOUR FATHER, BOR! OLDER THAN HIS FATHER, BURI!
OLDER EVEN THAN I!
I HAVE RELEASED THAT ANCIENT POWER ON MIDGARD AND NOW, CALLED ALL ITS TERRIBLE ANGER TO ASGARD!

EVEN THE ODIN POWER CANNOT WITHSTAND ITS RAGE!
SCHRAKAKKKK!
KARAKKKK!
AND BEHOLD! THE ALLFATHER HIMSELF IMPRISONED WITHIN A CRYSTAL OF ICY MALEVOLENCE!
NOT ALL THE ANCIENT POWERS, LORD ODIN, THANK THEE FOR BRINGING ORDER TO THE NINE WORLDS AND DEPRIVING THEM OF THEIR ANCIENT DOMINIONS!
AND THIS IS THEIR HOUR!
WELL DO I KNOW THAT EVEN NOW, GIVEN TIME, YOU COULD BREAK THE POWER OF THE FRIGID WINTER AND FREE YOURSELF FROM THIS RESTRAINT.
BLIKSPLIGGLE GRAMPF
BUT YOU HAVE NO TIME!
ONCE THE SWORD IS LIT, NO POWER IN THE UNIVERSE WILL BE ABLE TO STOP ME FROM FLINGING FIRE ACROSS THE NINE WORLDS!
YOU SAID THAT NOTHING COULD MOVE YOU FROM THE GATES OF YOUR REALM. AND YOU WERE RIGHT!


NOW YOU SHALL WATCH, UNABLE TO PREVENT IT, AS I FULFILL MY DESTINY AND DESTROY EVERYTHING YOU HAVE EVER LOVED!
ODIN SHALL BE LAST!
AND SURTUR OF MUSPELHEIM STEPS ACROSS THE WALLS OF ASGARD INTO HER SHINING STREETS.


AS IF IN RESPONSE TO HIS PRESENCE, THE ETERNAL FLAME BEFORE HIM BURNS BRIGHTER AND BRIGHTER UNTIL ITS RADIANCE SEEMS TO FILL THE VERY HEAVENS...
A HUSH SETTLES OVER THE WORLDS...
...AND ALL OF EXISTENCE SEEMS CONCENTRATED IN THE FLAME...



NEXT: DOOM II (UH-OH)

MARVEL
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60¢
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MAR
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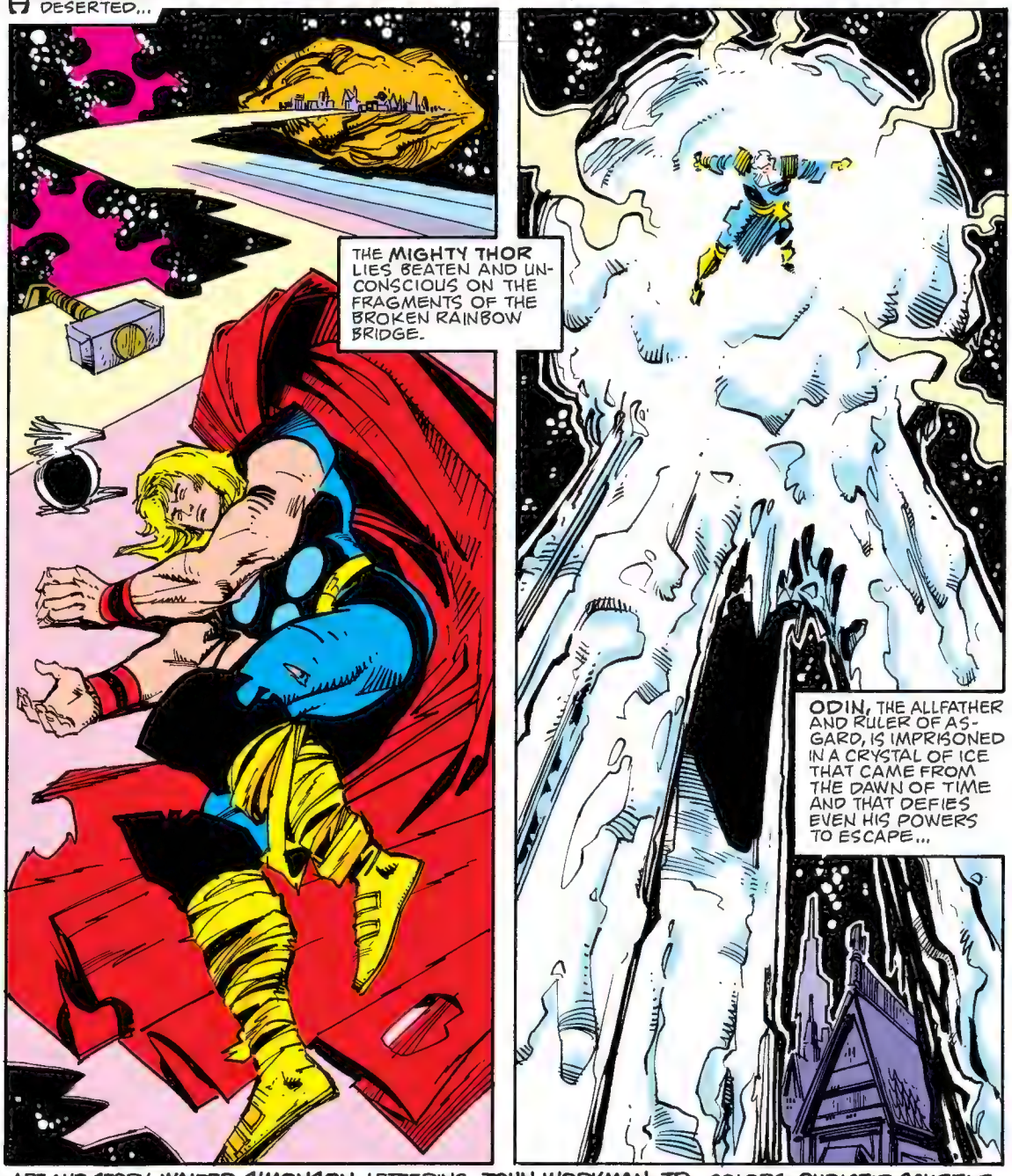
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
the mighty
THOR
THE FINALE OF THE
SURTUR SAGA!
2·16·84

STAN LEE PRESENTS: the MIGHTY THOR®

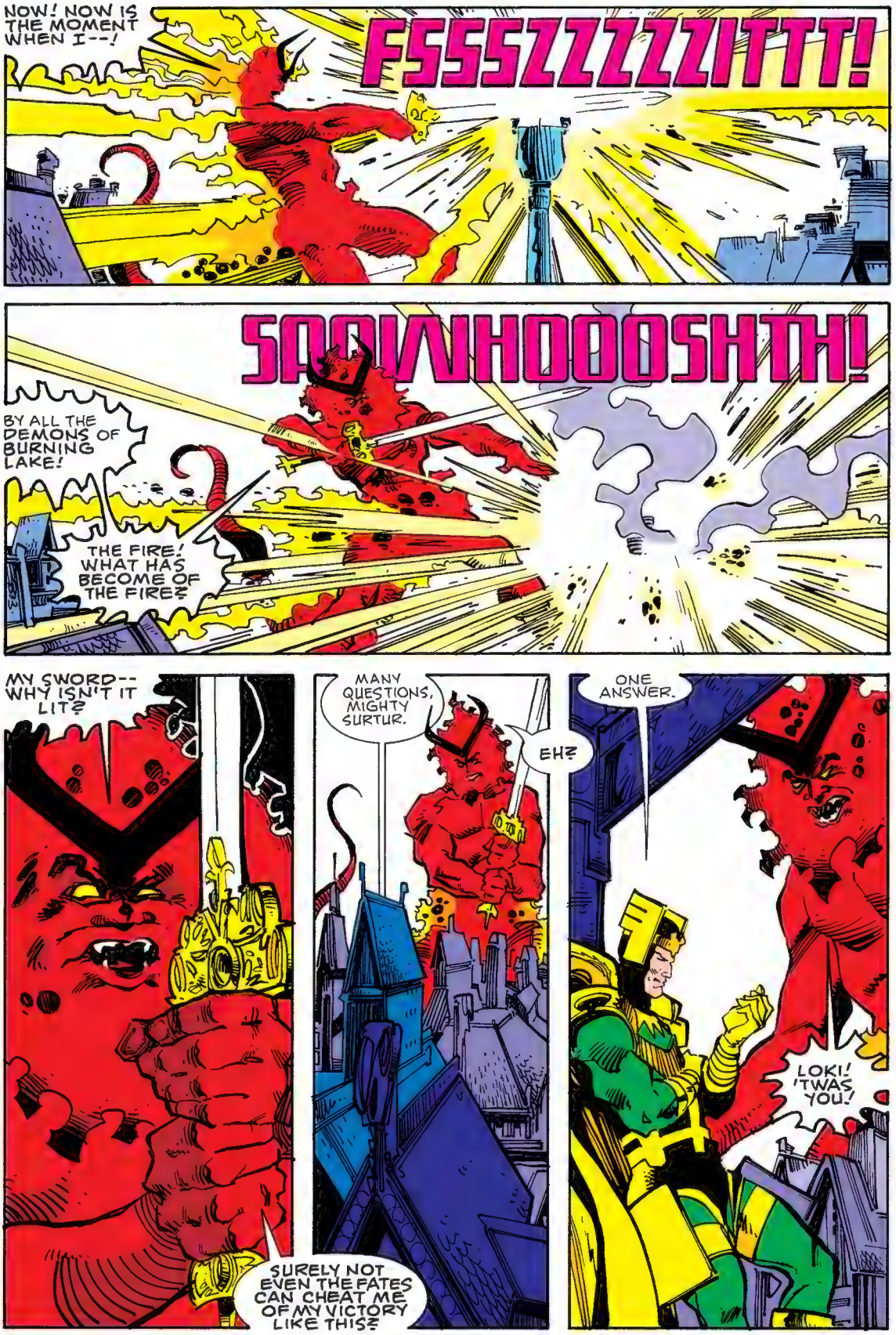
ASGARD, HOME OF THE MIGHTY NORSE GODS, STANDS EMPTY, HER HALLS ABANDONED, HER STREETS DESERTED...

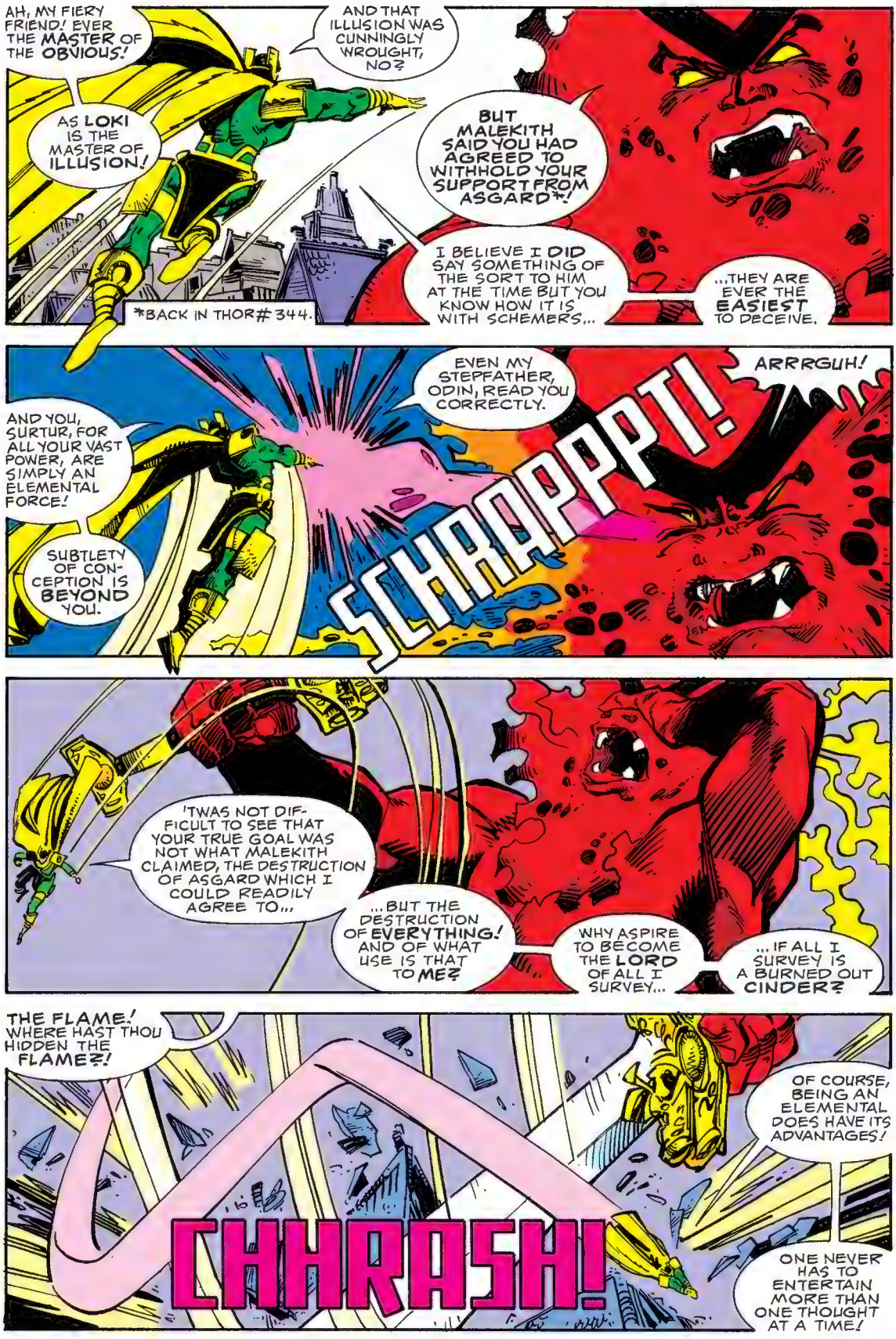

THE MIGHTY THOR LIES BEATEN AND UNCONSCIOUS ON THE FRAGMENTS OF THE BROKEN RAINBOW BRIDGE.
ODIN, THE ALLFATHER AND RULER OF ASGARD, IS IMPRISONED IN A CRYSTAL OF ICE THAT CAME FROM THE DAWN OF TIME AND THAT DEFIES EVEN HIS POWERS TO ESCAPE...

ART AND STORY: WALTER SIMONSON · LETTERING: JOHN WORKMAN, JR. · COLORS: CHRISTIE SCHEELE
EDITING: MARK GRUENWALD · EDITOR IN CHIEF: JIM SHOOTER

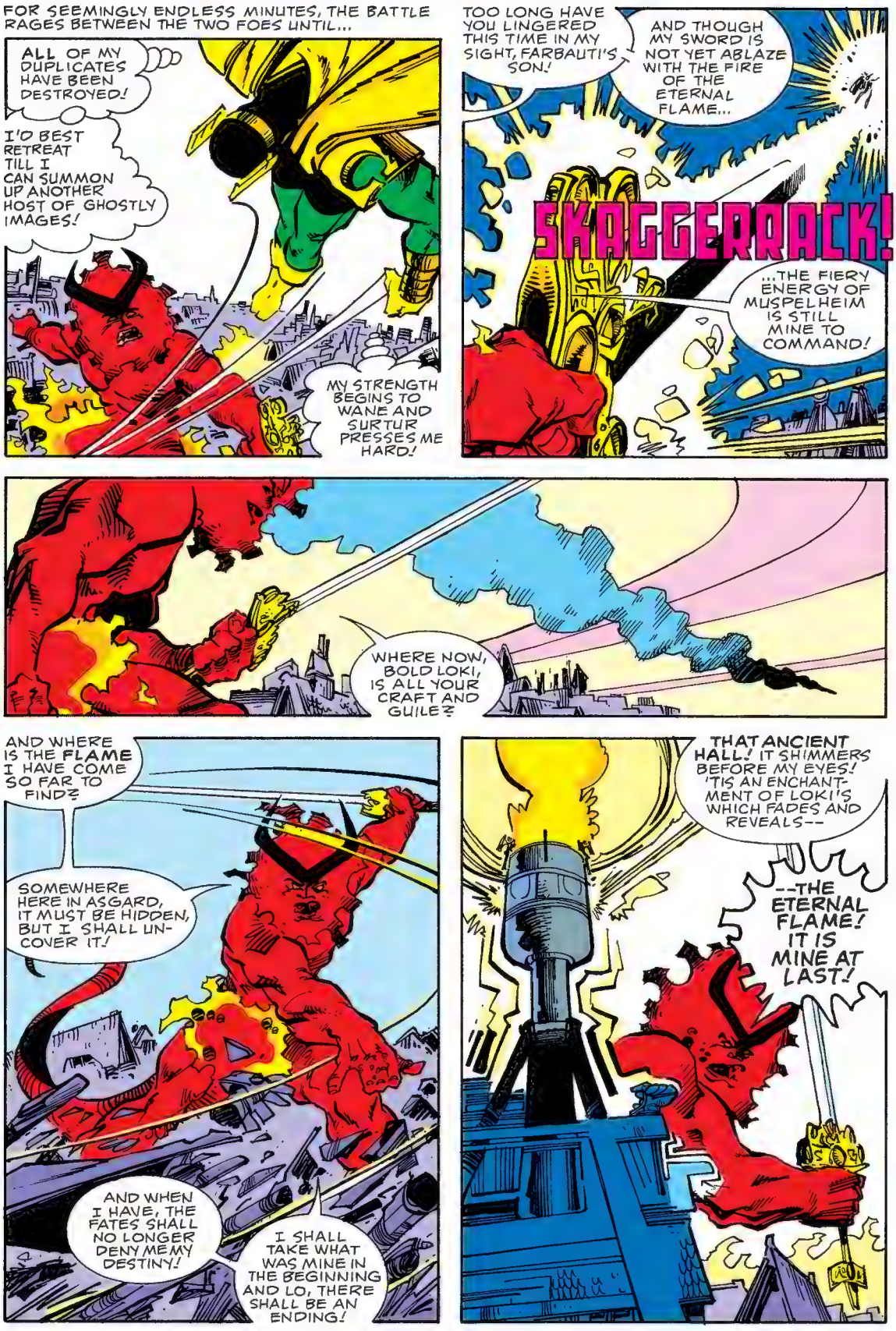
...AND IN THE CENTER OF THE FORSAKEN REALM STANDS THE AUTHOR OF THESE EVENTS--**SURTUR OF MUSPELHEIM,** LORD OF FLAME, ANCIENT OF DAYS, AND DEMON OF PROPHECY.

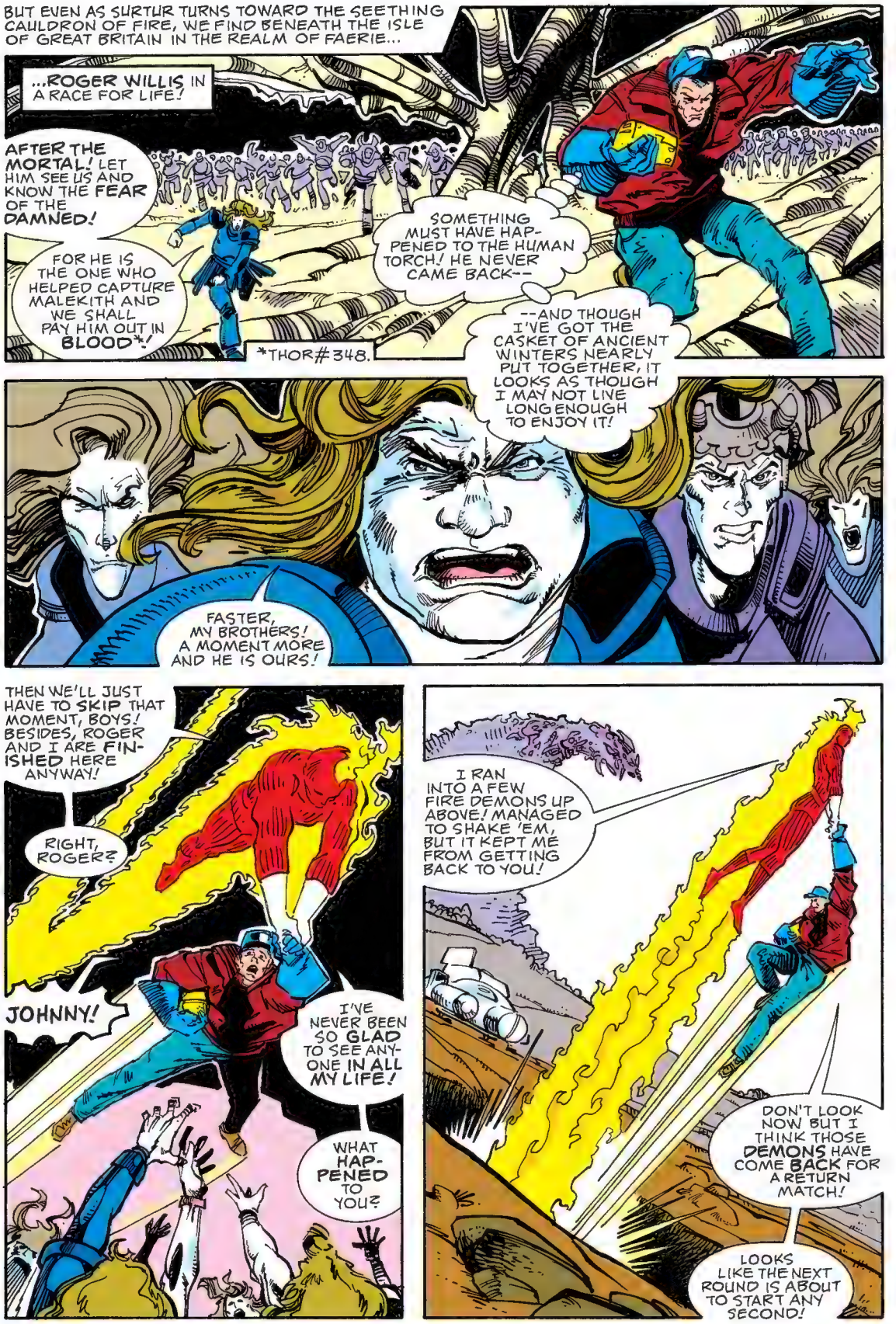
BEFORE HIM IS THE **ETERNAL FLAME,** AND EVEN AS WE WATCH, HE THRUSTS HIS GLOWING BLADE, **TWILIGHT,** INTO ITS VERY HEART!
ONCE MY SWORD IS LIT, NO POWER IN ALL THE UNIVERSE WILL BE ABLE TO PREVENT ME FROM FLINGING FIRE ACROSS THE NINE WORLDS...
...AND DESTROYING **ALL** THAT IS...
...AS I WAS MEANT TO DO FROM THE BEGINNING OF TIME*!
DOOM II
*THE GORY DETAILS ARE ALL IN THOR #350-352!

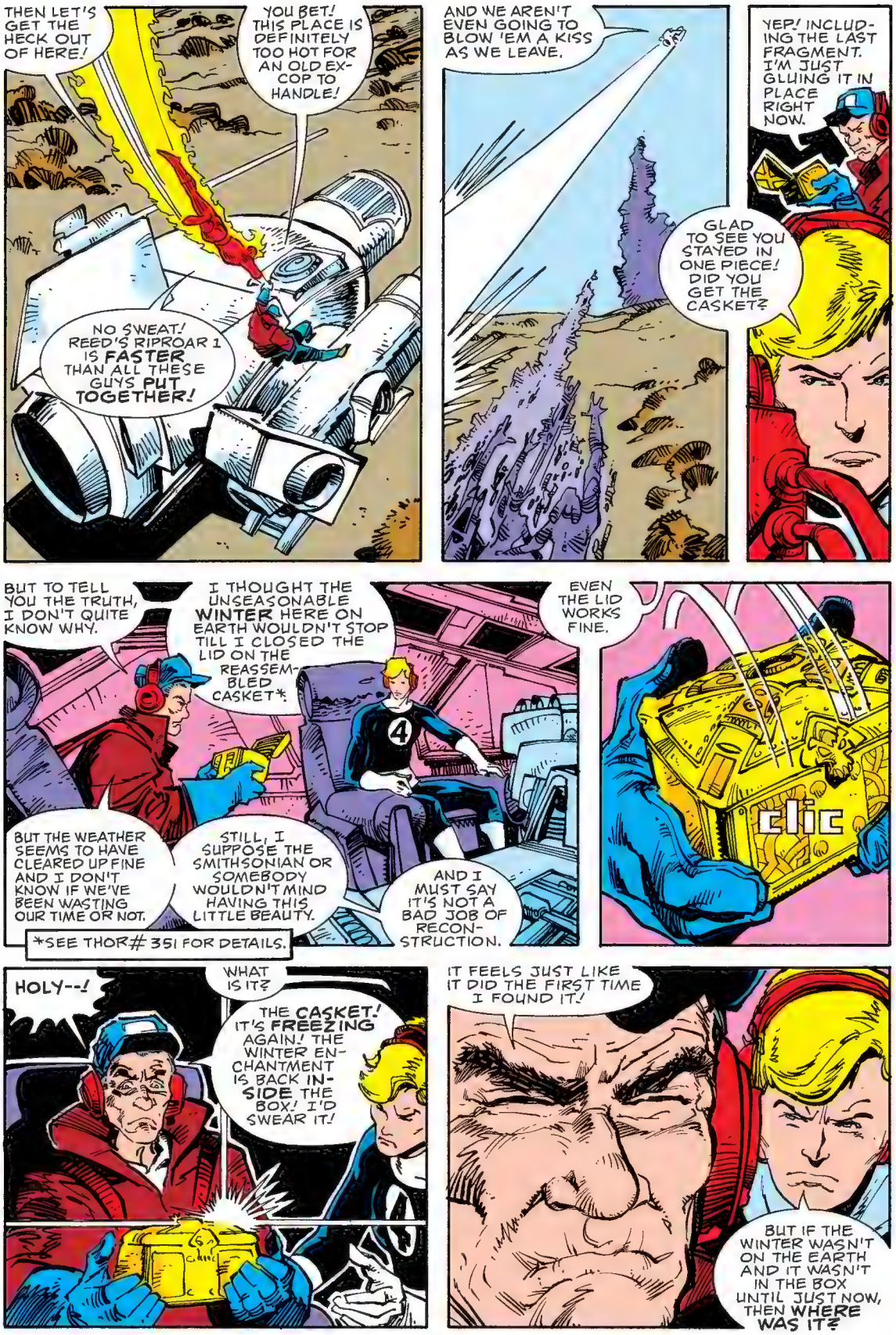

NOW! NOW IS THE MOMENT WHEN I--!
FSSSZZZZZITTT!
SPOWHOOOSHTH!
BY ALL THE DEMONS OF BURNING LAKE!
THE FIRE! WHAT HAS BECOME OF THE FIRE?
MY SWORD-- WHY ISN'T IT LIT?
SURELY NOT EVEN THE FATES CAN CHEAT ME OF MY VICTORY LIKE THIS?
MANY QUESTIONS, MIGHTY SURTUR.
EH?
ONE ANSWER.
LOKI! 'TWAS YOU!

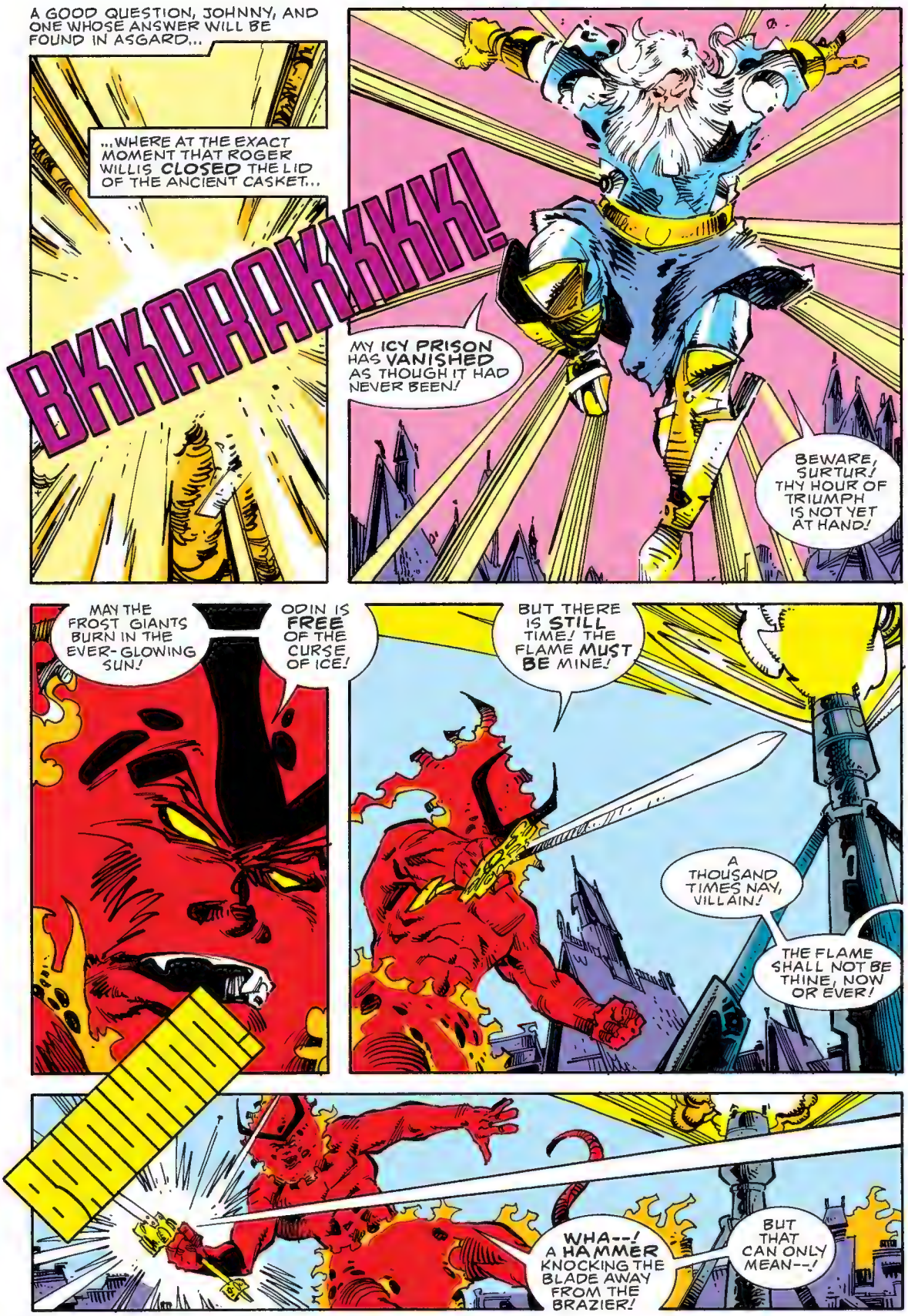

AH, MY FIERY FRIEND! EVER THE MASTER OF THE OBVIOUS!
AS LOKI IS THE MASTER OF ILLUSION!
AND THAT ILLUSION WAS CUNNINGLY WROUGHT, NO?
*BACK IN THOR #344.
BUT MALEKITH SAID YOU HAD AGREED TO WITHHOLD YOUR SUPPORT FROM ASGARD*!
I BELIEVE I DID SAY SOMETHING OF THE SORT TO HIM AT THE TIME BUT YOU KNOW HOW IT IS WITH SCHEMERS...
...THEY ARE EVER THE EASIEST TO DECEIVE.
AND YOU, SURTUR, FOR ALL YOUR VAST POWER, ARE SIMPLY AN ELEMENTAL FORCE!
SUBTLETY OF CONCEPTION IS BEYOND YOU.
EVEN MY STEPFATHER, ODIN, READ YOU CORRECTLY.
SCHRAPPT!
ARRRGUH!
'TWAS NOT DIFFICULT TO SEE THAT YOUR TRUE GOAL WAS NOT WHAT MALEKITH CLAIMED, THE DESTRUCTION OF ASGARD WHICH I COULD READILY AGREE TO...
...BUT THE DESTRUCTION OF EVERYTHING! AND OF WHAT USE IS THAT TO ME?
WHY ASPIRE TO BECOME THE LORD OF ALL I SURVEY...
...IF ALL I SURVEY IS A BURNED OUT CINDER?
THE FLAME! WHERE HAST THOU HIDDEN THE FLAME?!
CHHRASH!
OF COURSE, BEING AN ELEMENTAL DOES HAVE ITS ADVANTAGES!
ONE NEVER HAS TO ENTERTAIN MORE THAN ONE THOUGHT AT A TIME!

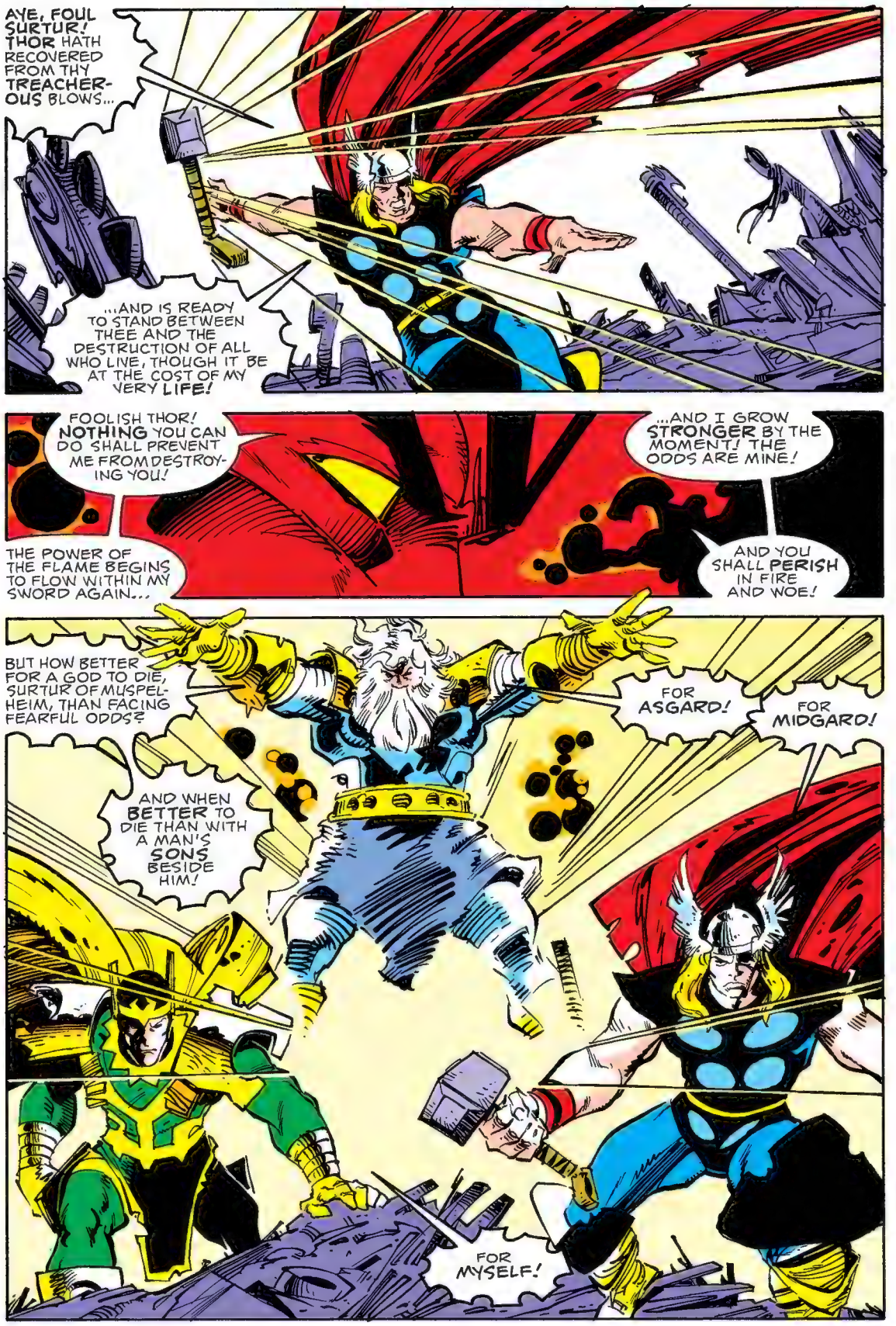
BUT EVEN A SIMPLE MIND, GRANTED A BODY OF GREAT POWER, MAY ACCOMPLISH MUCH IF ONE IS NOT CAREFUL.
MY STEP-BROTHER THOR IS THE LIVING PROOF OF THAT!
SO WE WILL TRY TO MAKE THE PURSUIT MORE INTERESTING!
ALL OF US!
FWAUKKTH!
MOCK ME IF YOU WILL, LOKI! BUT IN THE END, THERE SHALL BE ONLY ONE OF US!
AND IT SHALL NOT BE THE SHAVELING OF GIANTS!
PERHAPS NONE BUT I, THE SCION OF THE FROST GIANTS, COULD HAVE STOOD BETWEEN YOU AND THE FLAME AS NEITHER ODIN NOR THOR COULD!
ZZAPPT!

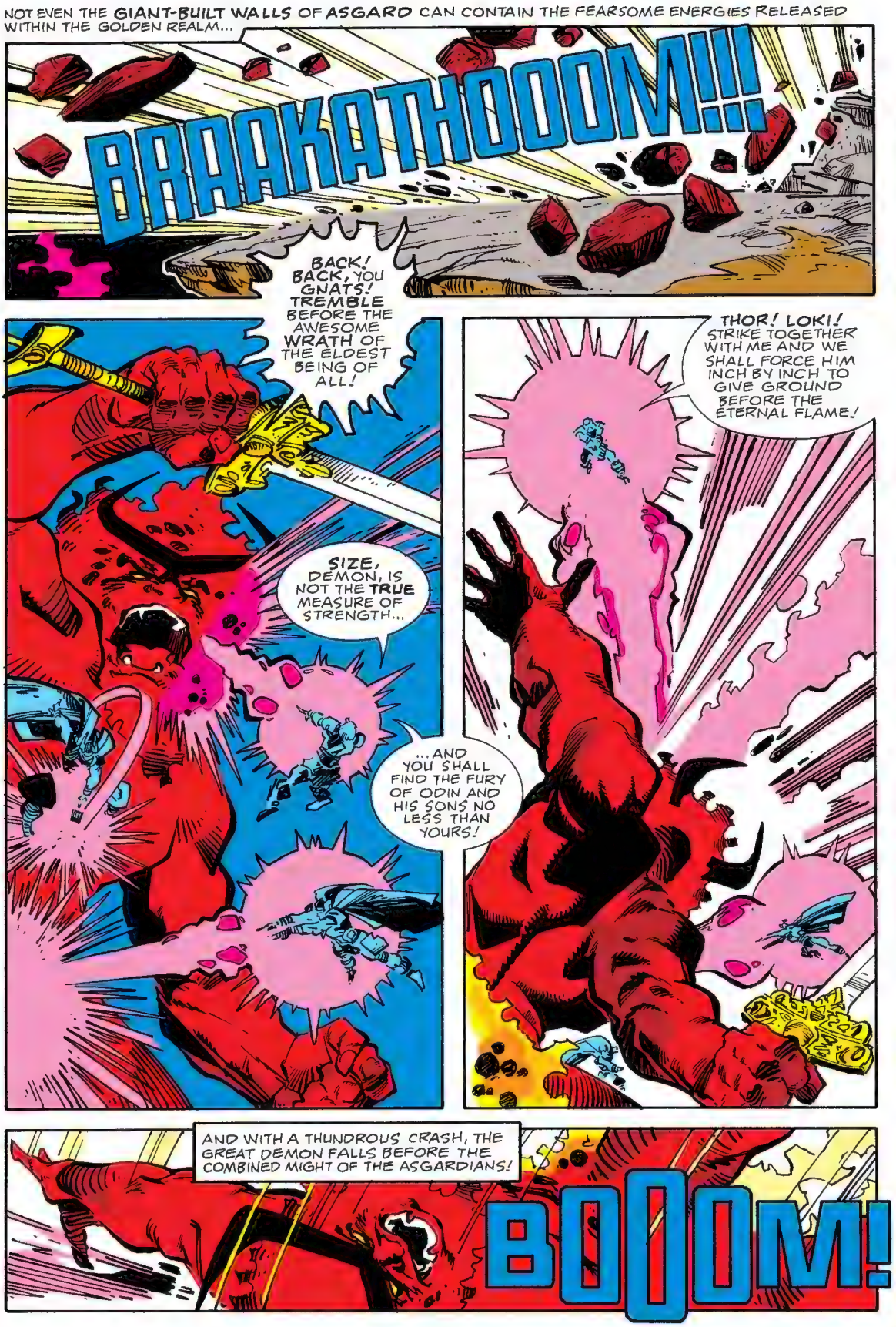

FOR SEEMINGLY ENDLESS MINUTES, THE BATTLE RAGES BETWEEN THE TWO FOES UNTIL...
ALL OF MY DUPLICATES HAVE BEEN DESTROYED!
I'D BEST RETREAT TILL I CAN SUMMON UP ANOTHER HOST OF GHOSTLY IMAGES!
MY STRENGTH BEGINS TO WANE AND SURTUR PRESSES ME HARD!
TOO LONG HAVE YOU LINGERED THIS TIME IN MY SIGHT, FARBAUTI'S SON!
AND THOUGH MY SWORD IS NOT YET ABLAZE WITH THE FIRE OF THE ETERNAL FLAME...
SKAGGERRACK!
...THE FIERY ENERGY OF MUSPELHEIM IS STILL MINE TO COMMAND!
WHERE NOW, BOLD LOKI, IS ALL YOUR CRAFT AND GUILE?
AND WHERE IS THE FLAME I HAVE COME SO FAR TO FIND?
SOMEWHERE HERE IN ASGARD, IT MUST BE HIDDEN, BUT I SHALL UNCOVER IT!
AND WHEN I HAVE, THE FATES SHALL NO LONGER DENY MEMY DESTINY!
I SHALL TAKE WHAT WAS MINE IN THE BEGINNING AND LO, THERE SHALL BE AN ENDING!
THAT ANCIENT HALL! IT SHIMMERS BEFORE MY EYES! 'TIS AN ENCHANTMENT OF LOKI'S WHICH FADES AND REVEALS--
--THE ETERNAL FLAME! IT IS MINE AT LAST!

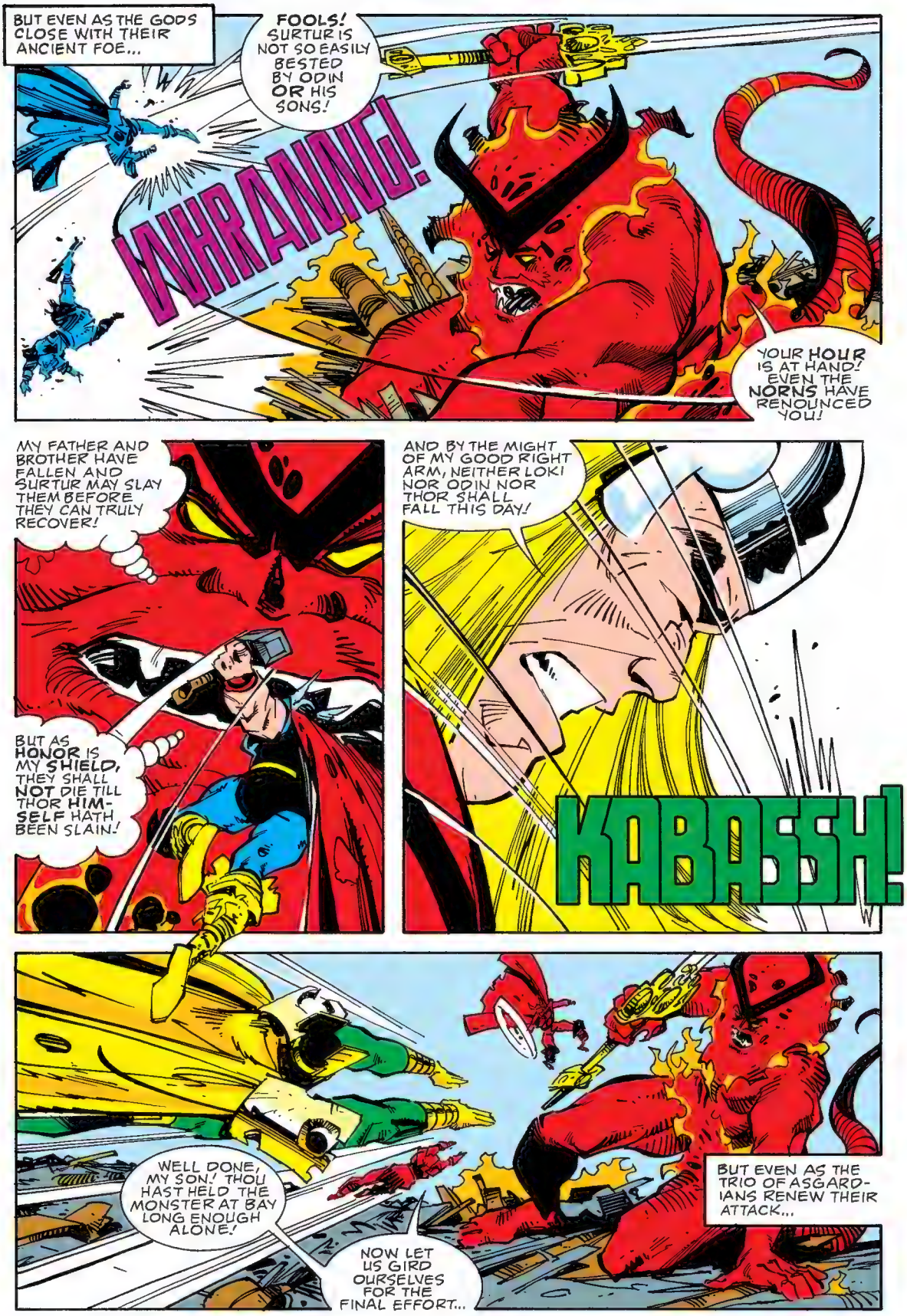

BUT EVEN AS SURTUR TURNS TOWARD THE SEETHING CAULDRON OF FIRE, WE FIND BENEATH THE ISLE OF GREAT BRITAIN IN THE REALM OF FAERIE...
...ROGER WILLIS IN A RACE FOR LIFE!
AFTER THE MORTAL! LET HIM SEE US AND KNOW THE FEAR OF THE DAMNED!
FOR HE IS THE ONE WHO HELPED CAPTURE MALEKITH AND WE SHALL PAY HIM OUT IN BLOOD*!
*THOR#348.
SOMETHING MUST HAVE HAPPENED TO THE HUMAN TORCH! HE NEVER CAME BACK--
--AND THOUGH I'VE GOT THE CASKET OF ANCIENT WINTERS NEARLY PUT TOGETHER, IT LOOKS AS THOUGH I MAY NOT LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO ENJOY IT!
FASTER, MY BROTHERS! A MOMENT MORE AND HE IS OURS!
THEN WE'LL JUST HAVE TO SKIP THAT MOMENT, BOYS! BESIDES, ROGER AND I ARE FINISHED HERE ANYWAY!
RIGHT, ROGER?
JOHNNY!
I'VE NEVER BEEN SO GLAD TO SEE ANYONE IN ALL MY LIFE!
WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?
I RAN INTO A FEW FIRE DEMONS UP ABOVE! MANAGED TO SHAKE 'EM, BUT IT KEPT ME FROM GETTING BACK TO YOU!
DON'T LOOK NOW BUT I THINK THOSE DEMONS HAVE COME BACK FOR A RETURN MATCH!
LOOKS LIKE THE NEXT ROUND IS ABOUT TO START ANY SECOND!


THEN LET'S GET THE HECK OUT OF HERE!
YOU BET! THIS PLACE IS DEFINITELY TOO HOT FOR AN OLD EX-COP TO HANDLE!
NO SWEAT! REED'S RIPROAR 1 IS FASTER THAN ALL THESE GUYS PUT TOGETHER!
AND WE AREN'T EVEN GOING TO BLOW 'EM A KISS AS WE LEAVE.
GLAD TO SEE YOU STAYED IN ONE PIECE! DID YOU GET THE CASKET?
YEP! INCLUDING THE LAST FRAGMENT. I'M JUST GLUING IT IN PLACE RIGHT NOW.
BUT TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, I DON'T QUITE KNOW WHY.
I THOUGHT THE UNSEASONABLE WINTER HERE ON EARTH WOULDN'T STOP TILL I CLOSED THE LID ON THE REASSEMBLED CASKET*.
EVEN THE LID WORKS FINE.
clic
BUT THE WEATHER SEEMS TO HAVE CLEARED UP FINE AND I DON'T KNOW IF WE'VE BEEN WASTING OUR TIME OR NOT.
STILL, I SUPPOSE THE SMITHSONIAN OR SOMEBODY WOULDN'T MIND HAVING THIS LITTLE BEAUTY.
AND I MUST SAY IT'S NOT A BAD JOB OF RECONSTRUCTION.
*SEE THOR# 351 FOR DETAILS.
HOLY--!
WHAT IS IT?
THE CASKET! IT'S FREEZING AGAIN! THE WINTER ENCHANTMENT IS BACK INSIDE THE BOX! I'D SWEAR IT!
IT FEELS JUST LIKE IT DID THE FIRST TIME I FOUND IT!
BUT IF THE WINTER WASN'T ON THE EARTH AND IT WASN'T IN THE BOX UNTIL JUST NOW, THEN WHERE WAS IT?

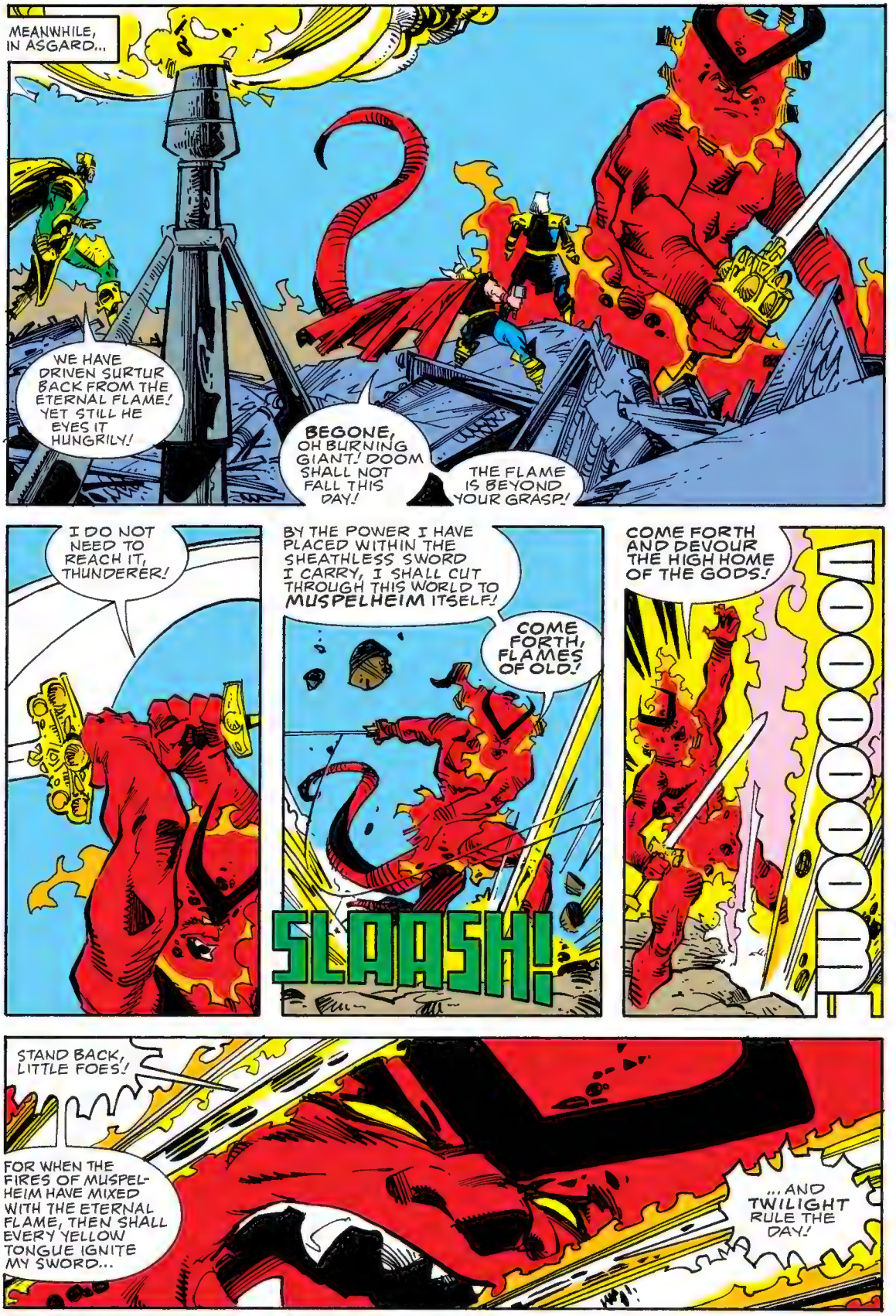

A GOOD QUESTION, JOHNNY, AND ONE WHOSE ANSWER WILL BE FOUND IN ASGARD...
...WHERE AT THE EXACT MOMENT THAT ROGER WILLIS CLOSED THE LID OF THE ANCIENT CASKET...
BKKARAKKKK!
MY ICY PRISON HAS VANISHED AS THOUGH IT HAD NEVER BEEN!
BEWARE, SURTUR! THY HOUR OF TRIUMPH IS NOT YET AT HAND!
MAY THE FROST GIANTS BURN IN THE EVER-GLOWING SUN!
ODIN IS FREE OF THE CURSE OF ICE!
BUT THERE IS STILL TIME! THE FLAME MUST BE MINE!
A THOUSAND TIMES NAY, VILLAIN!
THE FLAME SHALL NOT BE THINE, NOW OR EVER!
BOOOOOM!
WHA--! A HAMMER KNOCKING THE BLADE AWAY FROM THE BRAZIER!
BUT THAT CAN ONLY MEAN--!

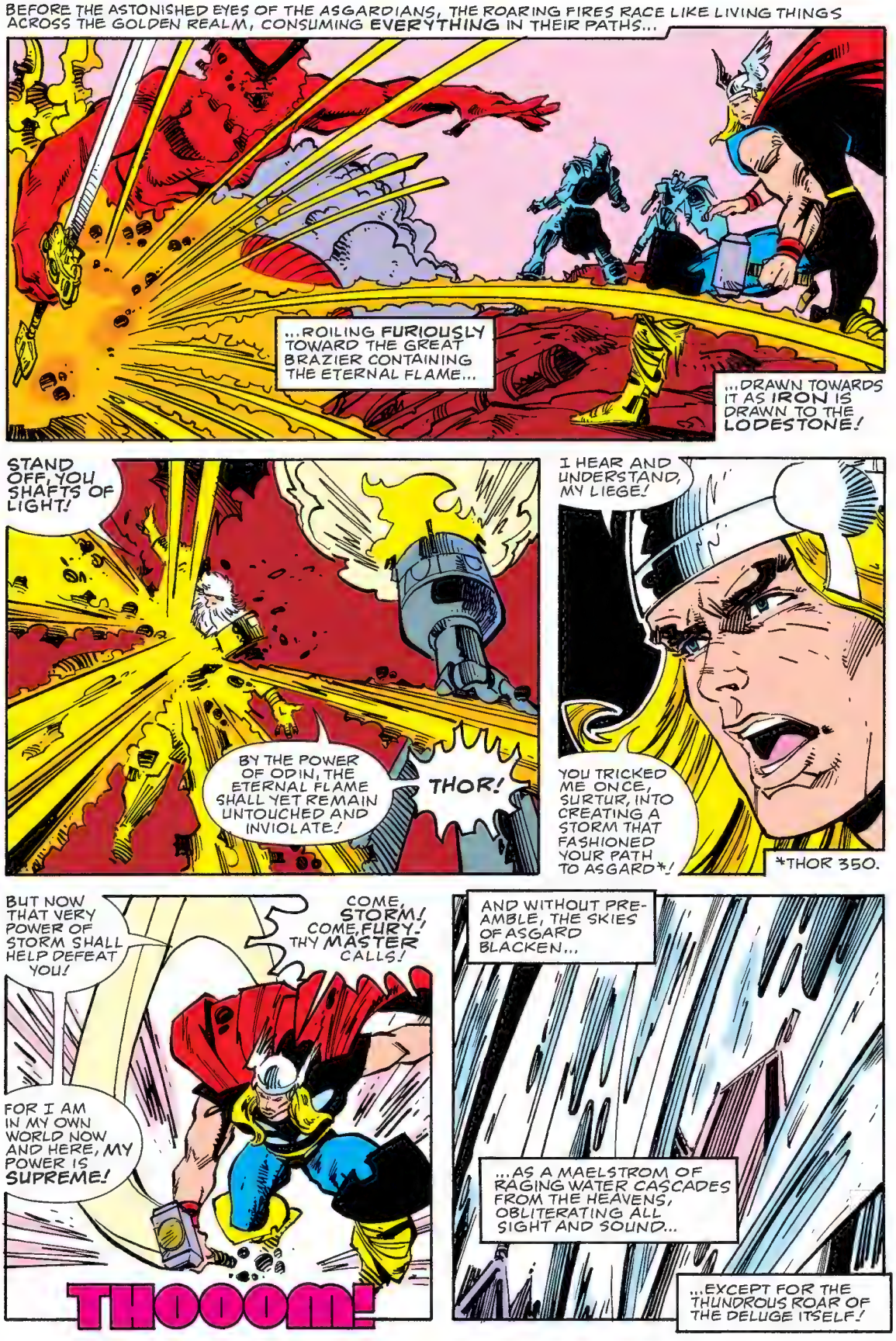

AYE, FOUL SURTUR! THOR HATH RECOVERED FROM THY TREACHEROUS BLOWS...
...AND IS READY TO STAND BETWEEN THEE AND THE DESTRUCTION OF ALL WHO LIVE, THOUGH IT BE AT THE COST OF MY VERY LIFE!
FOOLISH THOR! NOTHING YOU CAN DO SHALL PREVENT ME FROM DESTROYING YOU!
...AND I GROW STRONGER BY THE MOMENT! THE ODDS ARE MINE!
THE POWER OF THE FLAME BEGINS TO FLOW WITHIN MY SWORD AGAIN...
AND YOU SHALL PERISH IN FIRE AND WOE!
BUT HOW BETTER FOR A GOD TO DIE, SURTUR OF MUSPELHEIM, THAN FACING FEARFUL ODDS?
FOR ASGARD!
FOR MIDGARD!
AND WHEN BETTER TO DIE THAN WITH A MAN'S SONS BESIDE HIM!
FOR MYSELF!

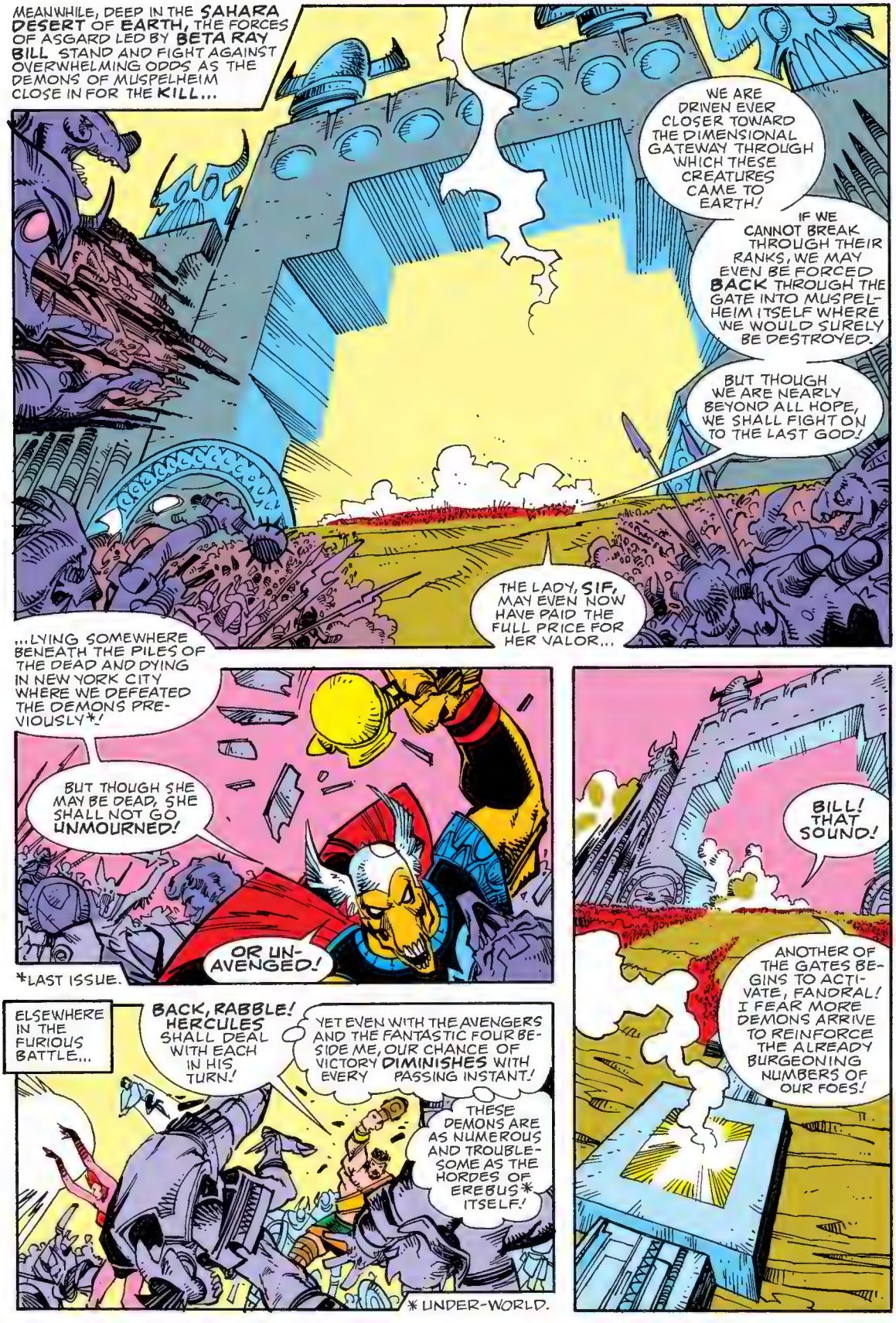

NOT EVEN THE GIANT-BUILT WALLS OF ASGARD CAN CONTAIN THE FEARSOME ENERGIES RELEASED WITHIN THE GOLDEN REALM...
BRAAKATHOOOM!!!
BACK! BACK, YOU GNATS! TREMBLE BEFORE THE AWESOME WRATH OF THE ELDEST BEING OF ALL!
SIZE, DEMON, IS NOT THE TRUE MEASURE OF STRENGTH...
...AND YOU SHALL FIND THE FURY OF ODIN AND HIS SONS NO LESS THAN YOURS!
THOR! LOKI! STRIKE TOGETHER WITH ME AND WE SHALL FORCE HIM INCH BY INCH TO GIVE GROUND BEFORE THE ETERNAL FLAME!
AND WITH A THUNDROUS CRASH, THE GREAT DEMON FALLS BEFORE THE COMBINED MIGHT OF THE ASGARDIANS!
BOOOM!

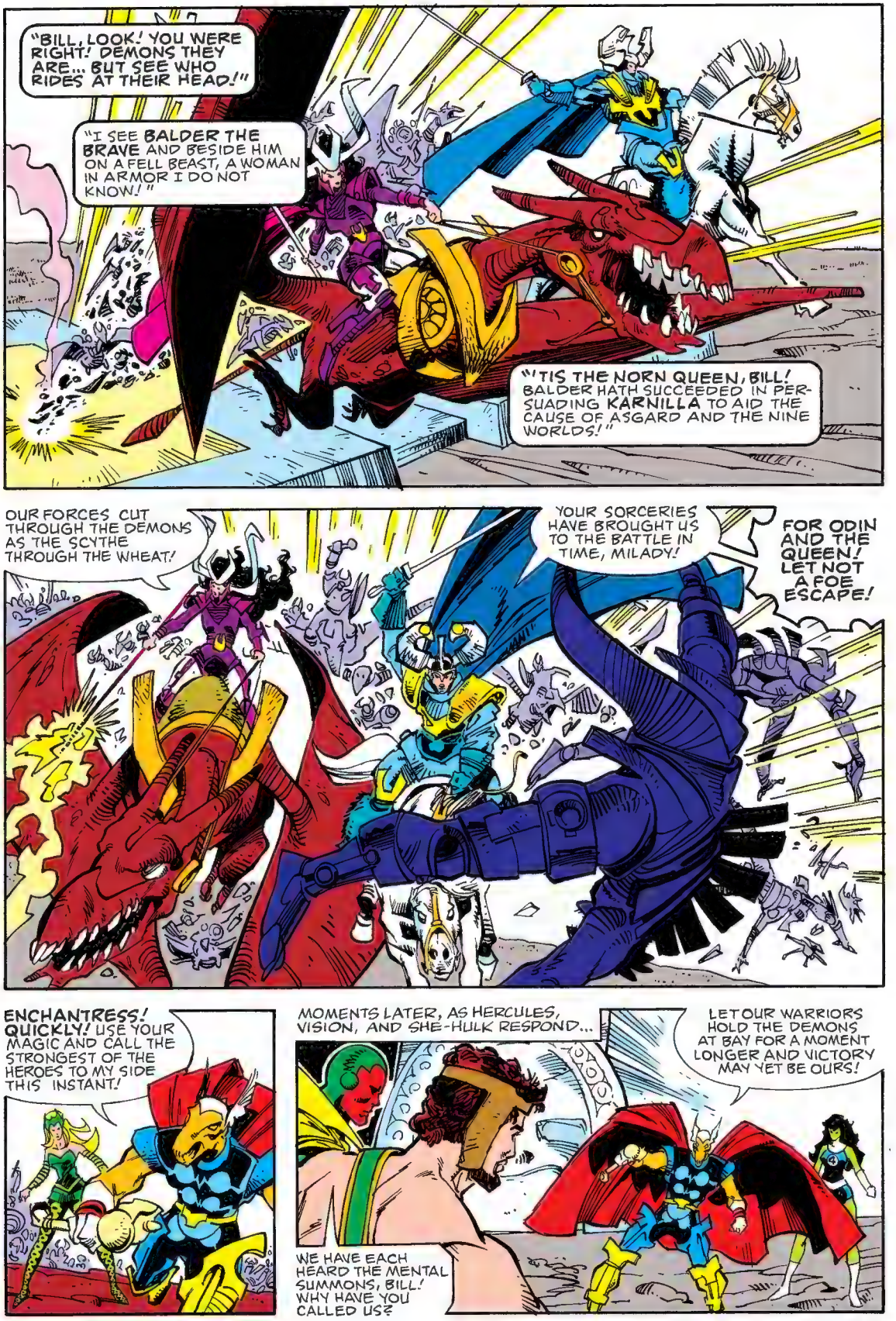

BUT EVEN AS THE GODS CLOSE WITH THEIR ANCIENT FOE...
FOOLS! SURTUR IS NOT SO EASILY BESTED BY ODIN OR HIS SONS!
WHRANNG!
YOUR HOUR IS AT HAND! EVEN THE NORNS HAVE RENOUNCED YOU!
MY FATHER AND BROTHER HAVE FALLEN AND SURTUR MAY SLAY THEM BEFORE THEY CAN TRULY RECOVER!
BUT AS HONOR IS MY SHIELD, THEY SHALL NOT DIE TILL THOR HIMSELF HATH BEEN SLAIN!
AND BY THE MIGHT OF MY GOOD RIGHT ARM, NEITHER LOKI NOR ODIN NOR THOR SHALL FALL THIS DAY!
KABASSH!
WELL DONE, MY SON! THOU HAST HELD THE MONSTER AT BAY LONG ENOUGH ALONE!
NOW LET US GIRD OURSELVES FOR THE FINAL EFFORT...
BUT EVEN AS THE TRIO OF ASGARDIANS RENEW THEIR ATTACK...

...IN THE FURTHEST REACHES OF THE GOLDEN REALM, AT THE BRIDGE ABOVE THE ENDLESS CHASM...
ENOUGH TIME! I TAKE YOUNGLING FOR DINNER NOW!
...A LARGE TROLL CONFRONTS ODIN'S WIFE, FRIGGA, AND HER CHARGES, THE CHILDREN OF ASGARD...
FORGET IT, FISHFACE! WE'VE ALREADY EATEN!
NICE GOING, ARNGRIM!
HE'S COMPLETELY FORGOTTEN THAT I GOT BEHIND HIM* AND MY PREPARATIONS ARE FINISHED!
NOW TO REMIND HIM THAT I'M HERE!
*LAST ISSUE.
RAUUGH!
THAT DID IT! I HOPE THE ROPE I'VE GOT TIED AROUND MY WAIST HOLDS! HERE HE COMES!
AND HERE COMES THE AXE! RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE BRIDGE!
CRACCLAKK!
AAEEIIEE!
JUST LIKE EVERY TROLL! A DUMMY!

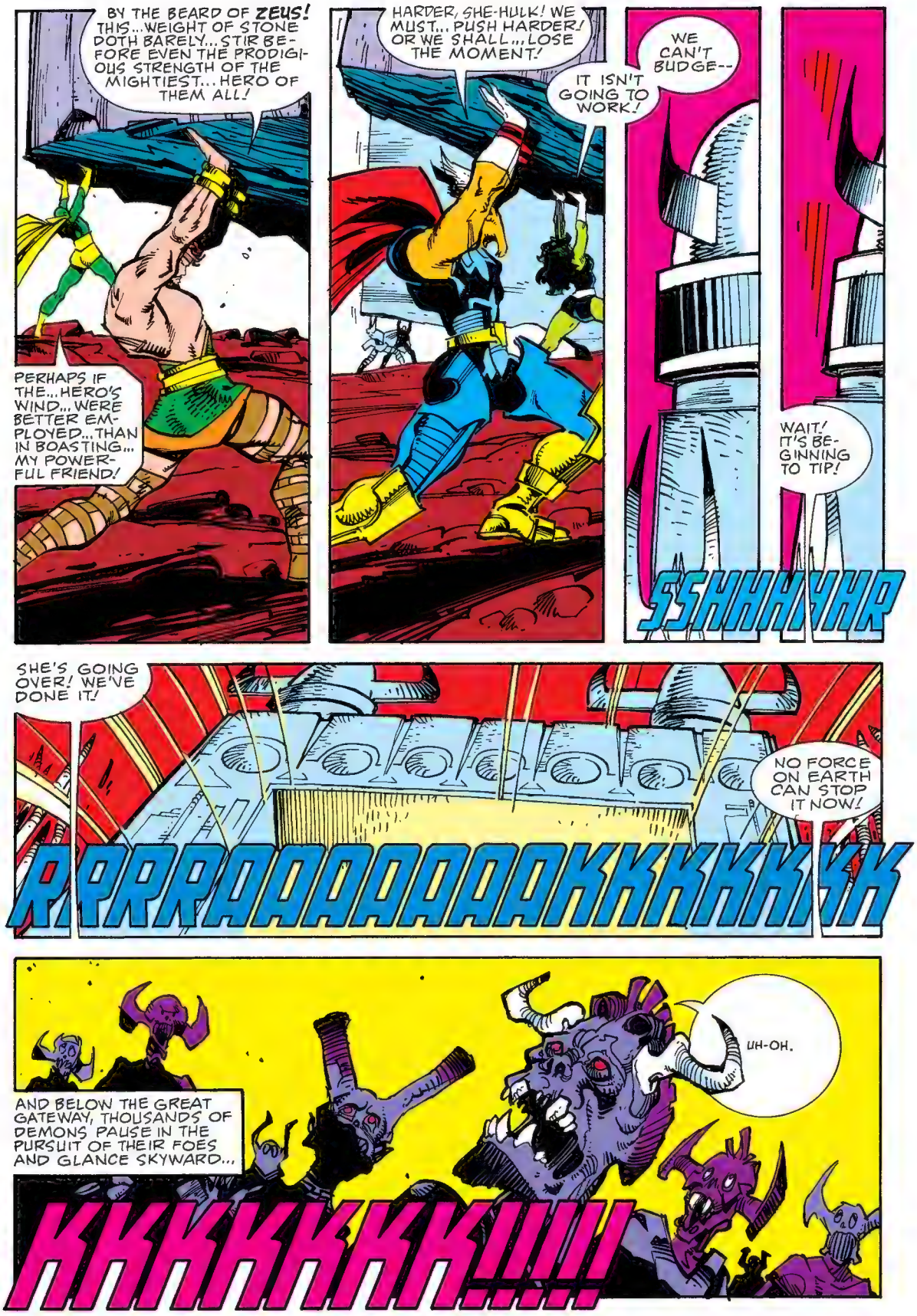

MEANWHILE, IN ASGARD...
WE HAVE DRIVEN SURTUR BACK FROM THE ETERNAL FLAME! YET STILL HE EYES IT HUNGRILY!
BEGONE, OH BURNING GIANT! DOOM SHALL NOT FALL THIS DAY!
THE FLAME IS BEYOND YOUR GRASP!
I DO NOT NEED TO REACH IT, THUNDERER!
BY THE POWER I HAVE PLACED WITHIN THE SHEATHLESS SWORD I CARRY, I SHALL CUT THROUGH THIS WORLD TO MUSPELHEIM ITSELF!
COME FORTH, FLAMES OF OLD!
SLAASH!
COME FORTH AND DEVOUR THE HIGH HOME OF THE GODS!
WOOO

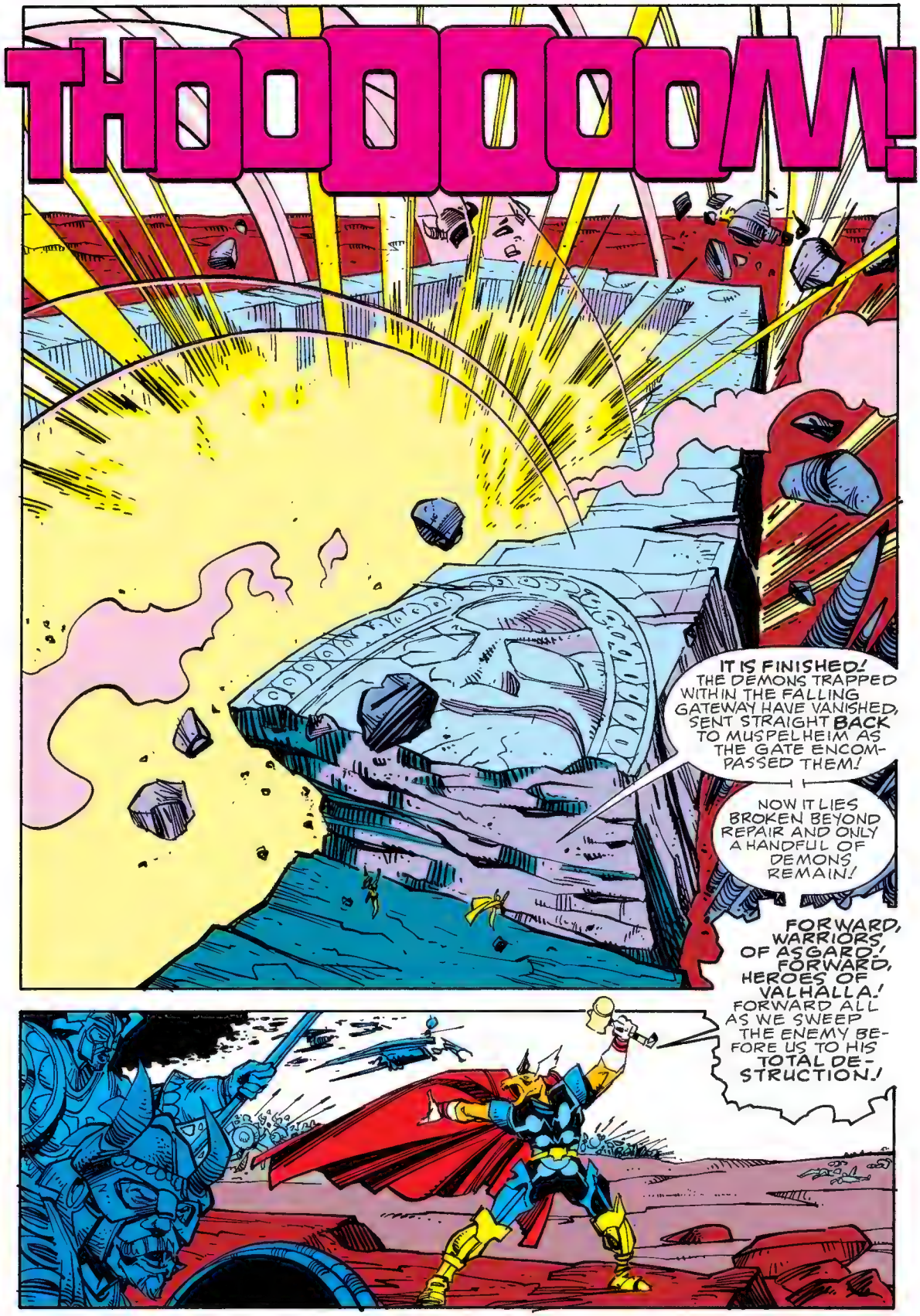

BEFORE THE ASTONISHED EYES OF THE ASGARDIANS, THE ROARING FIRES RACE LIKE LIVING THINGS ACROSS THE GOLDEN REALM, CONSUMING EVERYTHING IN THEIR PATHS...
...ROILING FURIOUSLY TOWARD THE GREAT BRAZIER CONTAINING THE ETERNAL FLAME...
...DRAWN TOWARDS IT AS IRON IS DRAWN TO THE LODESTONE!
STAND OFF, YOU SHAFTS OF LIGHT!
BY THE POWER OF ODIN, THE ETERNAL FLAME SHALL YET REMAIN UNTOUCHED AND INVIOLATE!
THOR!
I HEAR AND UNDERSTAND, MY LIEGE!
YOU TRICKED ME ONCE, SURTUR, INTO CREATING A STORM THAT FASHIONED YOUR PATH TO ASGARD*!
*THOR 350.
BUT NOW THAT VERY POWER OF STORM SHALL HELP DEFEAT YOU!
COME, STORM! COME, FURY! THY MASTER CALLS!
FOR I AM IN MY OWN WORLD NOW AND HERE, MY POWER IS SUPREME!
THOOOM!
AND WITHOUT PREAMBLE, THE SKIES OF ASGARD BLACKEN...
...AS A MAELSTROM OF RAGING WATER CASCADES FROM THE HEAVENS, OBLITERATING ALL SIGHT AND SOUND...
...EXCEPT FOR THE THUNDROUS ROAR OF THE DELUGE ITSELF!

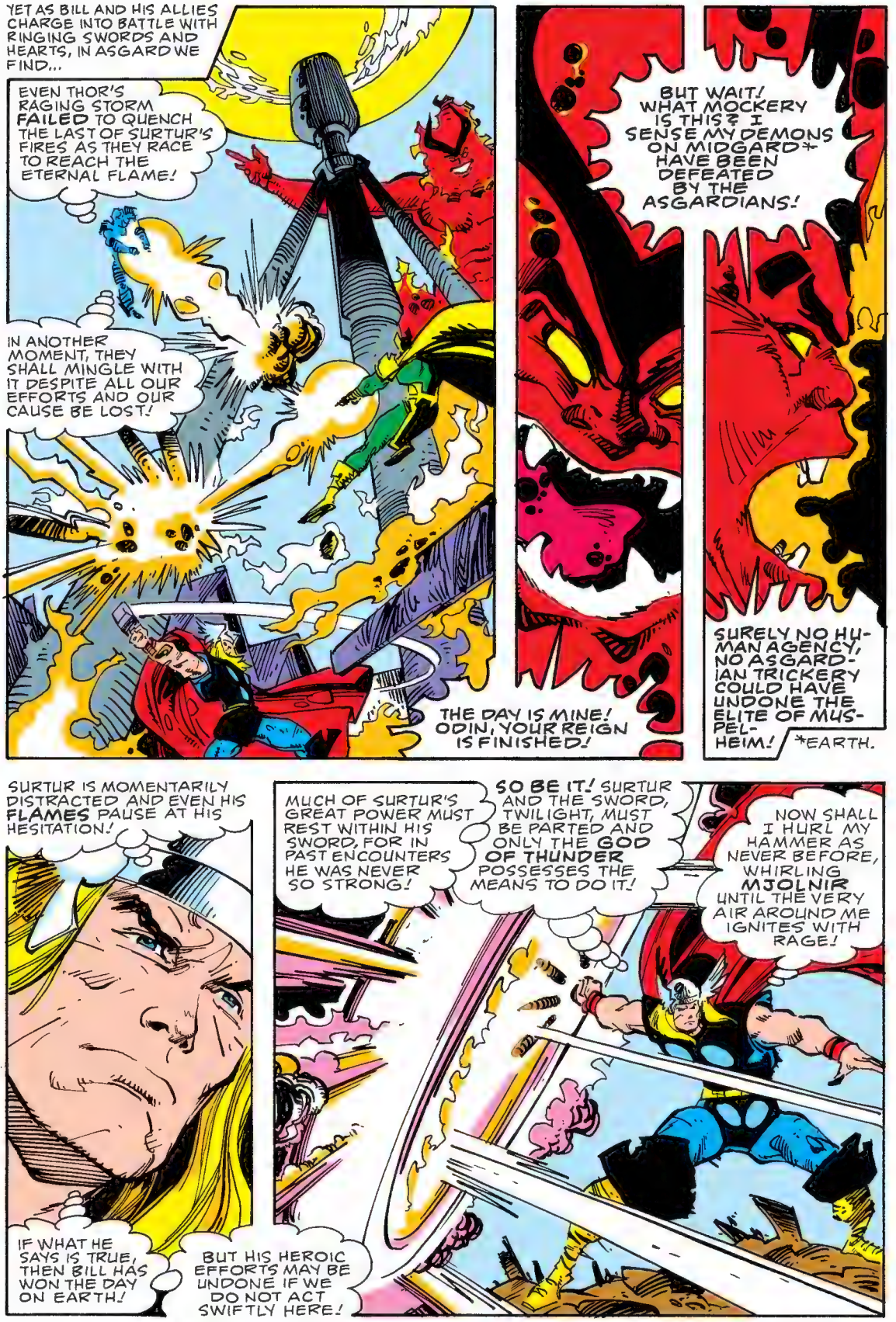

MEANWHILE, DEEP IN THE SAHARA DESERT OF EARTH, THE FORCES OF ASGARD LED BY BETA RAY BILL STAND AND FIGHT AGAINST OVERWHELMING ODDS AS THE DEMONS OF MUSPELHEIM CLOSE IN FOR THE KILL...
WE ARE DRIVEN EVER CLOSER TOWARD THE DIMENSIONAL GATEWAY THROUGH WHICH THESE CREATURES CAME TO EARTH!
IF WE CANNOT BREAK THROUGH THEIR RANKS, WE MAY EVEN BE FORCED BACK THROUGH THE GATE INTO MUSPELHEIM ITSELF WHERE WE WOULD SURELY BE DESTROYED.
BUT THOUGH WE ARE NEARLY BEYOND ALL HOPE, WE SHALL FIGHT ON TO THE LAST GOD!
THE LADY, SIF, MAY EVEN NOW HAVE PAID THE FULL PRICE FOR HER VALOR...
...LYING SOMEWHERE BENEATH THE PILES OF THE DEAD AND DYING IN NEW YORK CITY WHERE WE DEFEATED THE DEMONS PREVIOUSLY*!
BUT THOUGH SHE MAY BE DEAD, SHE SHALL NOT GO UNMOURNED!
OR UNAVENGED!
*LAST ISSUE.
BILL! THAT SOUND!
ANOTHER OF THE GATES BEGINS TO ACTIVATE, FANDRAL! I FEAR MORE DEMONS ARRIVE TO REINFORCE THE ALREADY BURGEONING NUMBERS OF OUR FOES!
ELSEWHERE IN THE FURIOUS BATTLE...
BACK, RABBLE! HERCULES SHALL DEAL WITH EACH IN HIS TURN!
YET EVEN WITH THE AVENGERS AND THE FANTASTIC FOUR BESIDE ME, OUR CHANCE OF VICTORY DIMINISHES WITH EVERY PASSING INSTANT!
THESE DEMONS ARE AS NUMEROUS AND TROUBLESOME AS THE HORDES OF EREBUS* ITSELF!
* UNDER-WORLD.

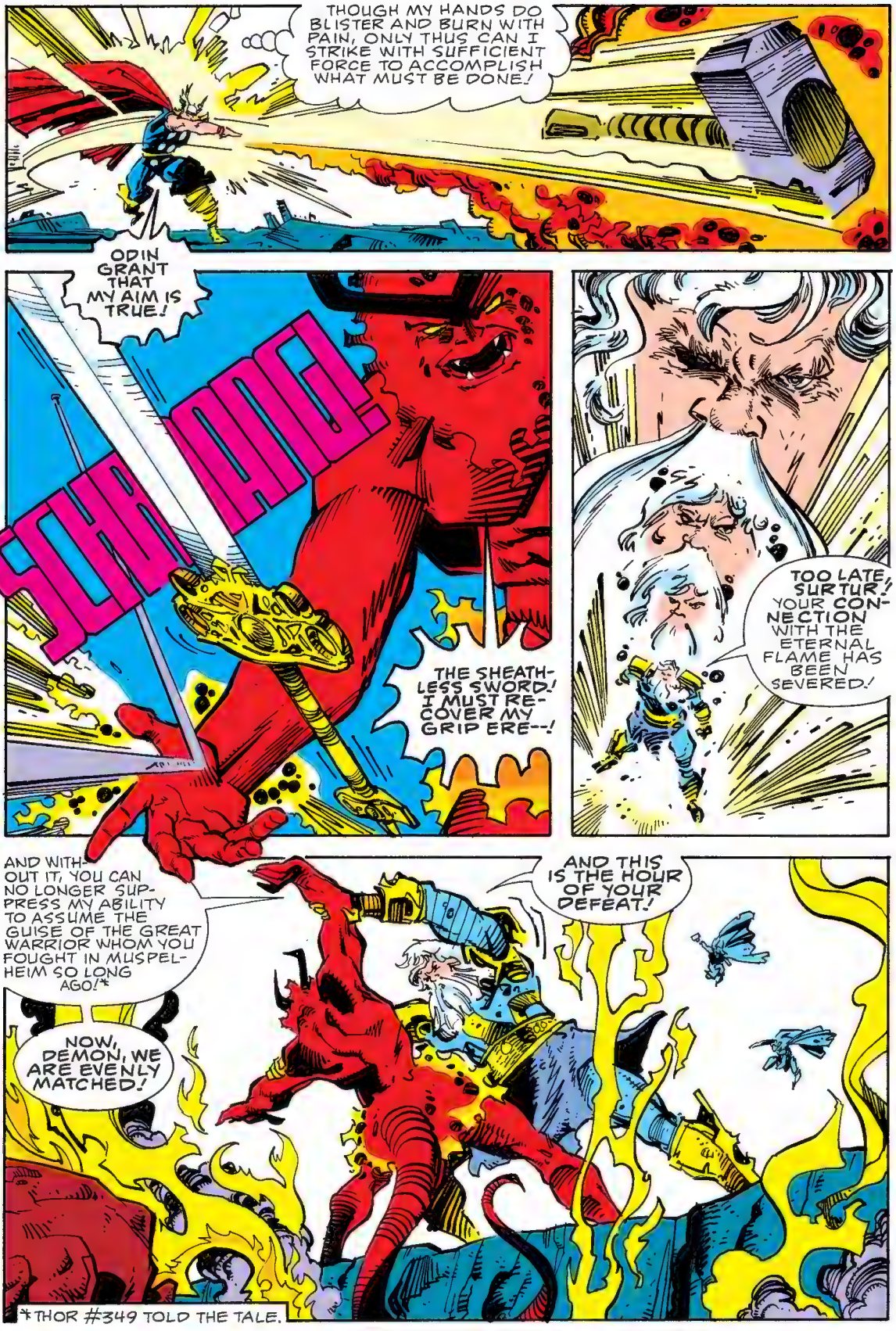

"BILL, LOOK! YOU WERE RIGHT! DEMONS THEY ARE... BUT SEE WHO RIDES AT THEIR HEAD!"
"I SEE BALDER THE BRAVE AND BESIDE HIM ON A FELL BEAST, A WOMAN IN ARMOR I DO NOT KNOW!"
"'TIS THE NORN QUEEN, BILL! BALDER HATH SUCCEEDED IN PERSUADING KARNILLA TO AID THE CAUSE OF ASGARD AND THE NINE WORLDS!"
OUR FORCES CUT THROUGH THE DEMONS AS THE SCYTHE THROUGH THE WHEAT!
YOUR SORCERIES HAVE BROUGHT US TO THE BATTLE IN TIME, MILADY!
FOR ODIN AND THE QUEEN! LET NOT A FOE ESCAPE!
ENCHANTRESS! QUICKLY! USE YOUR MAGIC AND CALL THE STRONGEST OF THE HEROES TO MY SIDE THIS INSTANT!
MOMENTS LATER, AS HERCULES, VISION, AND SHE-HULK RESPOND...
LET OUR WARRIORS HOLD THE DEMONS AT BAY FOR A MOMENT LONGER AND VICTORY MAY YET BE OURS!
WE HAVE EACH HEARD THE MENTAL SUMMONS, BILL! WHY HAVE YOU CALLED US?

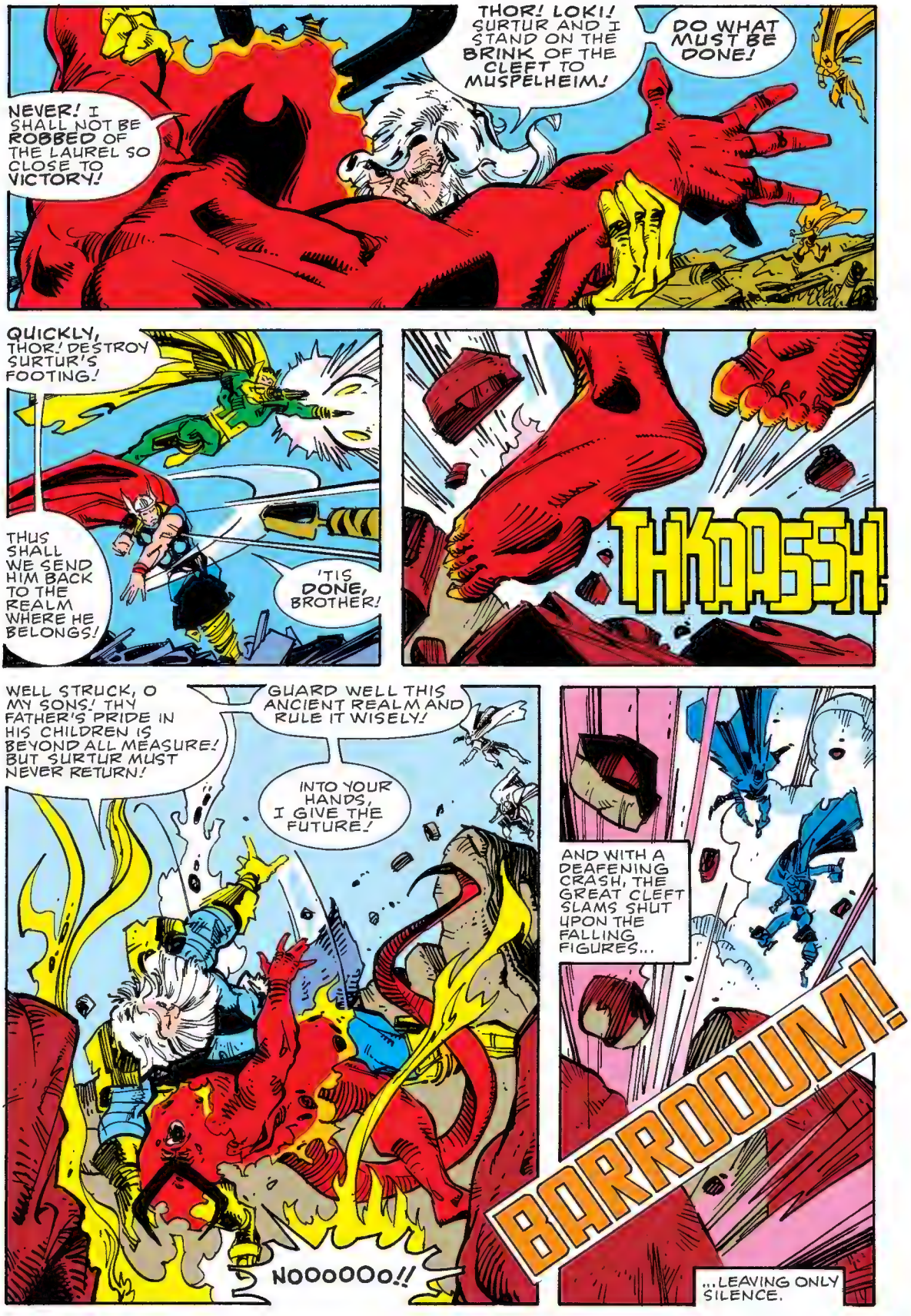
THE GREAT DIMENSIONAL GATEWAY IS THE ANSWER!
IT HAS BROUGHT OUR FOES TO EARTH! BUT IT MAY SERVE TO RID US OF THE DEMONS AS WELL.
AS QUICKLY AS YOU CAN, CUT THROUGH THE GREAT LEGS THAT SUPPORT THE ARCH AND BE READY TO TOPPLE THE GATEWAY WHEN I GIVE THE WORD!
EVEN THE NORN QUEEN'S FORCES WILL ONLY HOLD THE DEMONS AT BAY A MOMENT LONGER!
I HOPE YOU'VE GOT THIS FIGURED RIGHT, HANDSOME. YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE ANY REED RICHARDS TO ME.
TEAR!
RIPP!
SHREDD!
WE'LL KNOW IN A MOMENT, MISS! THE PILLARS BEGIN TO TREMBLE!
ENCHANTRESS, TELL KARNILLA TO SWING HER FORCES AROUND AND DRIVE THE DEMONS TOWARD THE GATEWAY...
"...AND CALL THE ASGARDIANS TO FALL BACK BEYOND THE FEET OF THE GREAT PILLARS, DRAWING THE DEMONS AFTER THEM!"
HERCULES, DO YOU HEAR IT? THE ENCHANTRESS' MENTAL COMMAND! THE MOMENT IS AT HAND!

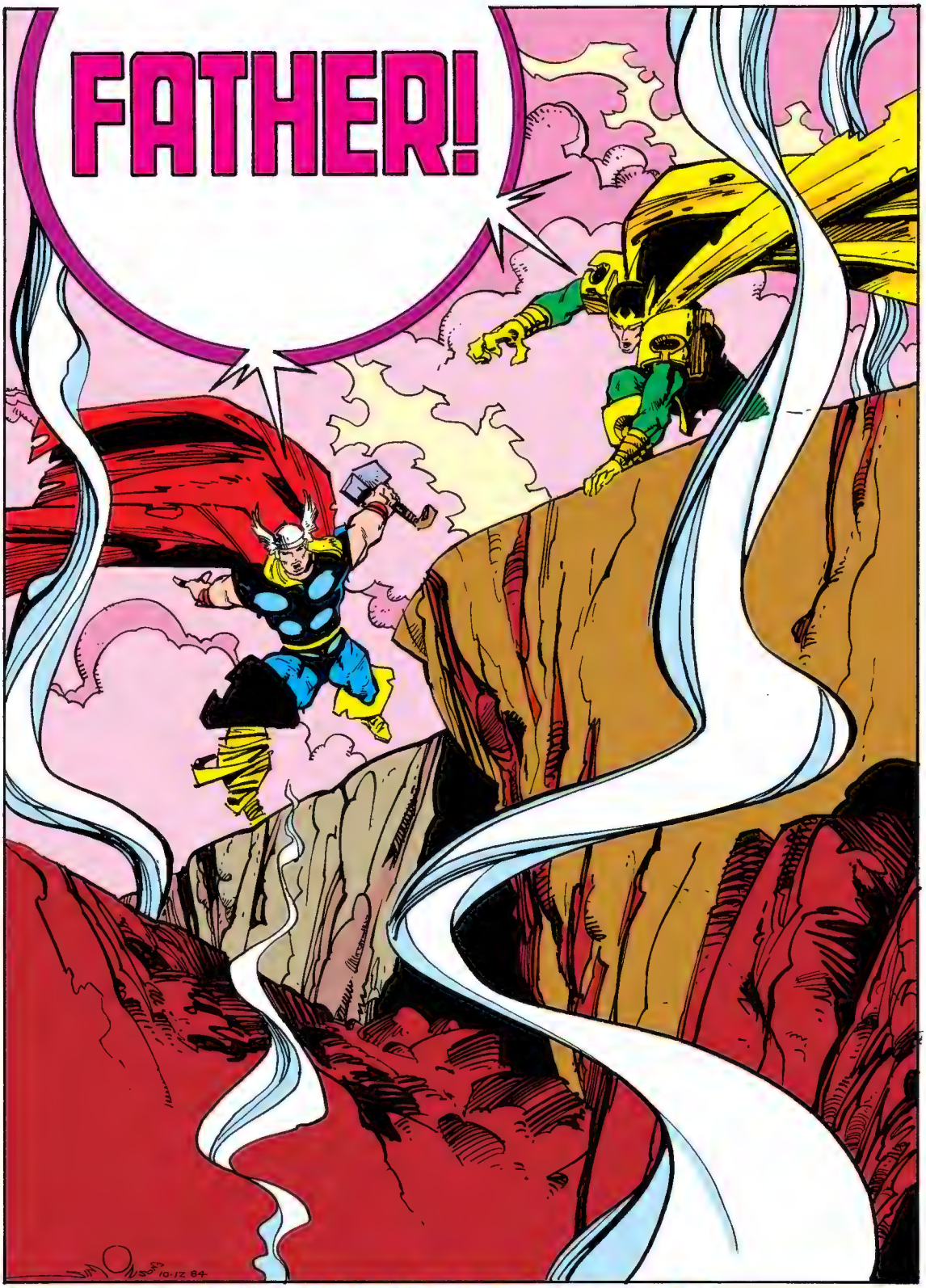

BY THE BEARD OF ZEUS! THIS...WEIGHT OF STONE DOTH BARELY...STIR BEFORE EVEN THE PRODIGIOUS STRENGTH OF THE MIGHTIEST...HERO OF THEM ALL!
PERHAPS IF THE...HERO'S WIND...WERE BETTER EMPLOYED...THAN IN BOASTING...MY POWERFUL FRIEND!
HARDER, SHE-HULK! WE MUST...PUSH HARDER! OR WE SHALL...LOSE THE MOMENT!
IT ISN'T GOING TO WORK!
WE CAN'T BUDGE--
WAIT! IT'S BEGINNING TO TIP!
SSHHHYHR
SHE'S GOING OVER! WE'VE DONE IT!
NO FORCE ON EARTH CAN STOP IT NOW!
RRRRAAAAAAAAAKKKKKKKK
UH-OH.
AND BELOW THE GREAT GATEWAY, THOUSANDS OF DEMONS PAUSE IN THE PURSUIT OF THEIR FOES AND GLANCE SKYWARD...
KKKKKKK!!!!!


THOOOOOOM!
IT IS FINISHED! THE DEMONS TRAPPED WITHIN THE FALLING GATEWAY HAVE VANISHED, SENT STRAIGHT BACK TO MUSPELHEIM AS THE GATE ENCOMPASSED THEM!
NOW IT LIES BROKEN BEYOND REPAIR AND ONLY A HANDFUL OF DEMONS REMAIN!
FORWARD, WARRIORS OF ASGARD! FORWARD, HEROES OF VALHALLA! FORWARD ALL AS WE SWEEP THE ENEMY BEFORE US TO HIS TOTAL DESTRUCTION!


YET AS BILL AND HIS ALLIES CHARGE INTO BATTLE WITH RINGING SWORDS AND HEARTS, IN ASGARD WE FIND...
EVEN THOR'S RAGING STORM FAILED TO QUENCH THE LAST OF SURTUR'S FIRES AS THEY RACE TO REACH THE ETERNAL FLAME!
IN ANOTHER MOMENT, THEY SHALL MINGLE WITH IT DESPITE ALL OUR EFFORTS AND OUR CAUSE BE LOST!
THE DAY IS MINE! ODIN, YOUR REIGN IS FINISHED!
BUT WAIT! WHAT MOCKERY IS THIS? I SENSE MY DEMONS ON MIDGARD* HAVE BEEN DEFEATED BY THE ASGARDIANS!
SURELY NO HUMAN AGENCY, NO ASGARDIAN TRICKERY COULD HAVE UNDONE THE ELITE OF MUSPELHEIM!
*EARTH.
SURTUR IS MOMENTARILY DISTRACTED AND EVEN HIS FLAMES PAUSE AT HIS HESITATION!
IF WHAT HE SAYS IS TRUE, THEN BILL HAS WON THE DAY ON EARTH!
BUT HIS HEROIC EFFORTS MAY BE UNDONE IF WE DO NOT ACT SWIFTLY HERE!
MUCH OF SURTUR'S GREAT POWER MUST REST WITHIN HIS SWORD, FOR IN PAST ENCOUNTERS HE WAS NEVER SO STRONG!
SO BE IT! SURTUR AND THE SWORD, TWILIGHT, MUST BE PARTED AND ONLY THE GOD OF THUNDER POSSESSES THE MEANS TO DO IT!
NOW SHALL I HURL MY HAMMER AS NEVER BEFORE, WHIRLING MJOLNIR UNTIL THE VERY AIR AROUND ME IGNITES WITH RAGE!


THOUGH MY HANDS DO BLISTER AND BURN WITH PAIN, ONLY THUS CAN I STRIKE WITH SUFFICIENT FORCE TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT MUST BE DONE!
ODIN GRANT THAT MY AIM IS TRUE!
SHA ING!
THE SHEATHLESS SWORD! I MUST RECOVER MY GRIP ERE--!
TOO LATE, SURTUR! YOUR CONNECTION WITH THE ETERNAL FLAME HAS BEEN SEVERED!
AND WITHOUT IT, YOU CAN NO LONGER SUPPRESS MY ABILITY TO ASSUME THE GUISE OF THE GREAT WARRIOR WHOM YOU FOUGHT IN MUSPELHEIM SO LONG AGO!*
NOW, DEMON, WE ARE EVENLY MATCHED!
AND THIS IS THE HOUR OF YOUR DEFEAT!
*THOR #349 TOLD THE TALE.


NEVER! I SHALL NOT BE ROBBED OF THE LAUREL SO CLOSE TO VICTORY!
THOR! LOKI! SURTUR AND I STAND ON THE BRINK OF THE CLEFT TO MUSPELHEIM!
DO WHAT MUST BE DONE!
QUICKLY, THOR! DESTROY SURTUR'S FOOTING!
THUS SHALL WE SEND HIM BACK TO THE REALM WHERE HE BELONGS!
'TIS DONE, BROTHER!
THKOOSSH!
WELL STRUCK, O MY SONS! THY FATHER'S PRIDE IN HIS CHILDREN IS BEYOND ALL MEASURE! BUT SURTUR MUST NEVER RETURN!
GUARD WELL THIS ANCIENT REALM AND RULE IT WISELY!
INTO YOUR HANDS, I GIVE THE FUTURE!
NOOOOOo!!
AND WITH A DEAFENING CRASH, THE GREAT CLEFT SLAMS SHUT UPON THE FALLING FIGURES...
BARROOUM!
...LEAVING ONLY SILENCE.



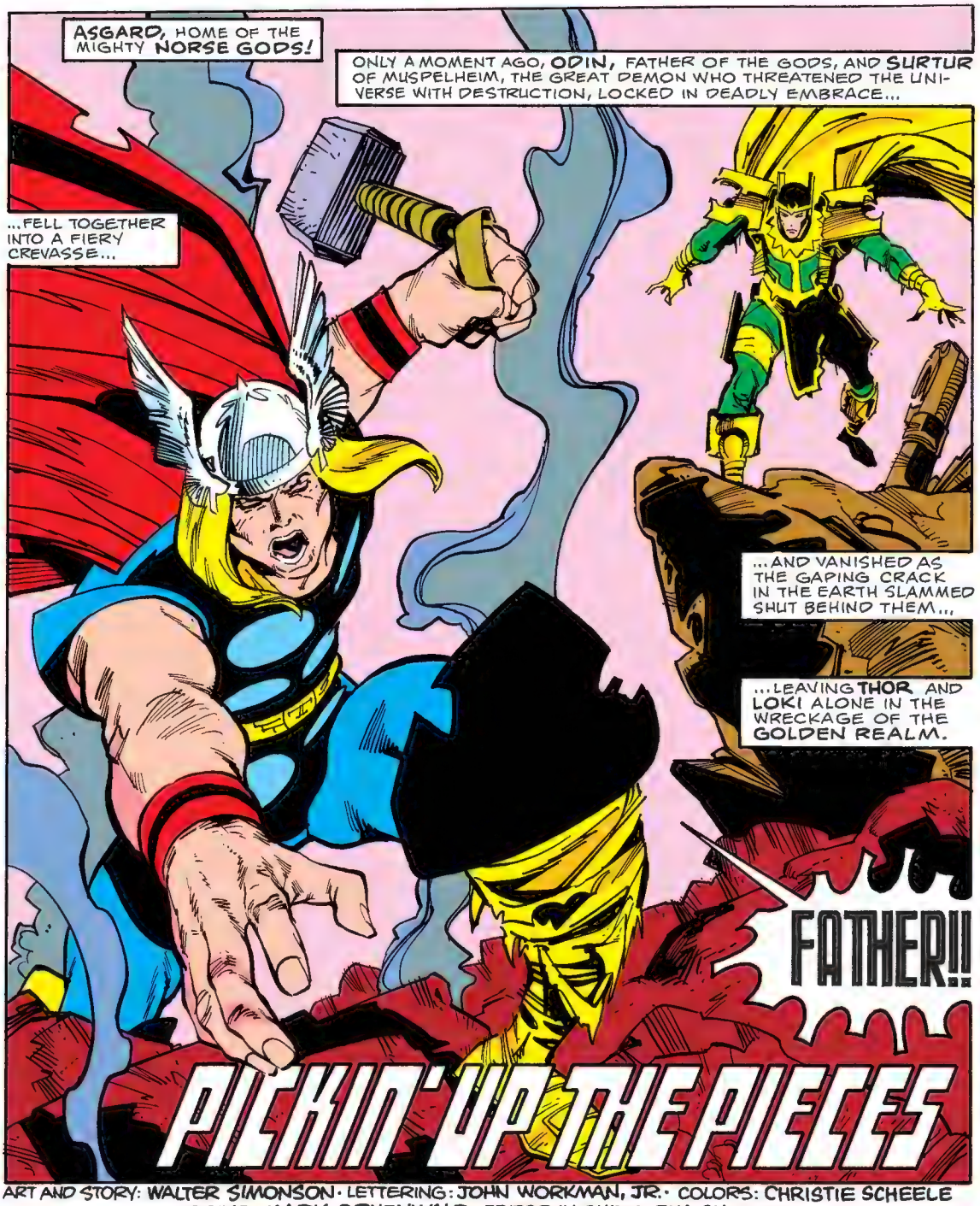
next: PICKIN' UP THE PIECES!

WHAT ELSE IS THERE TO SAY?

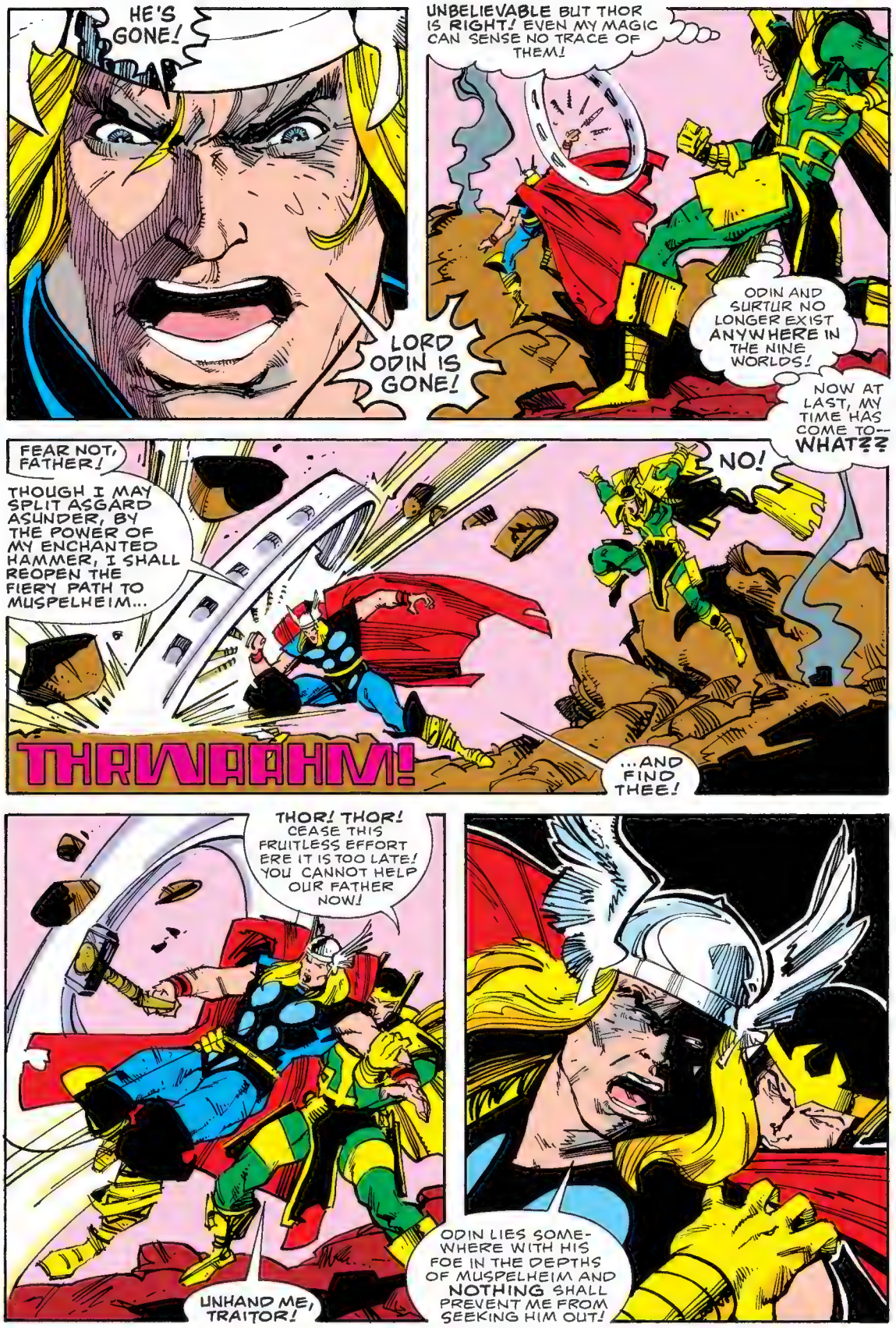
THIS ISSUE ESPECIALLY IS FOR STAN, JACK, VINNIE, ARTIE, AND SAM.

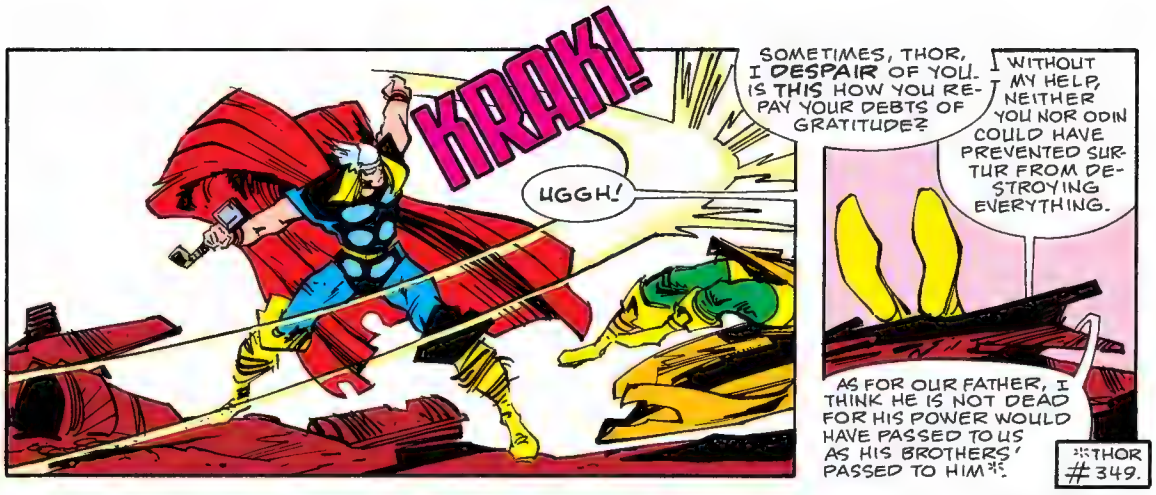
MARVEL
the mighty
THOR
©1984 MARVEL COMICS GROUP
TM
65¢
354
APR
02450
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
STAND ASIDE, THOR! FOR I AM DEATH...
...AND ODIN'S SOUL IS MINE!

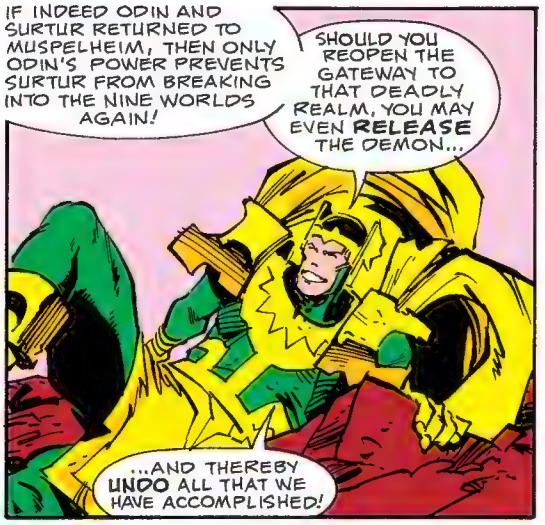
STAN LEE PRESENTS: the MIGHTY THOR®

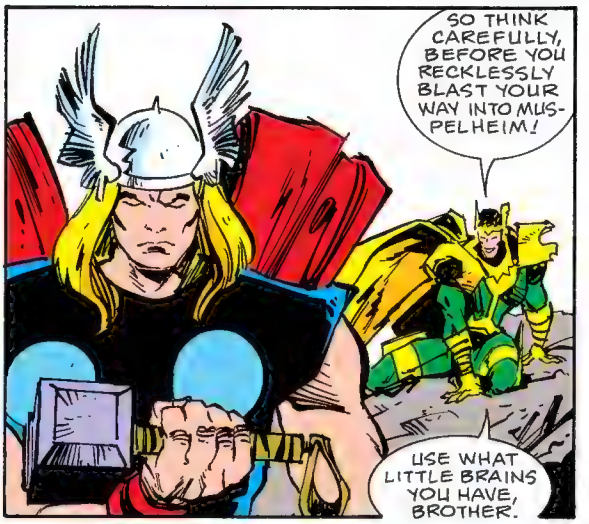

ASGARD, HOME OF THE MIGHTY NORSE GODS!
ONLY A MOMENT AGO, ODIN, FATHER OF THE GODS, AND SURTUR OF MUSPELHEIM, THE GREAT DEMON WHO THREATENED THE UNIVERSE WITH DESTRUCTION, LOCKED IN DEADLY EMBRACE...
...FELL TOGETHER INTO A FIERY CREVASSE...
...AND VANISHED AS THE GAPING CRACK IN THE EARTH SLAMMED SHUT BEHIND THEM...
...LEAVING THOR AND LOKI ALONE IN THE WRECKAGE OF THE GOLDEN REALM.
FATHER!!
PICKIN' UP THE PIECES

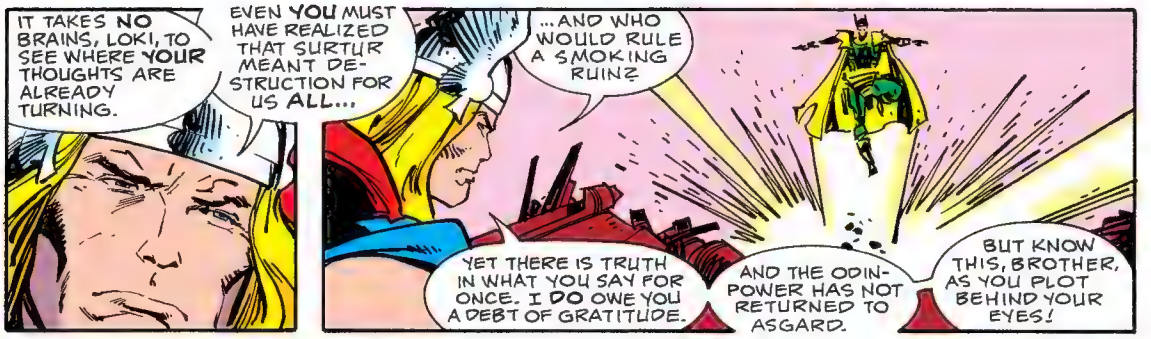
ART AND STORY: WALTER SIMONSON · LETTERING: JOHN WORKMAN, JR. · COLORS: CHRISTIE SCHEELE
EDITING: MARK GRUENWALD · EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: JIM SHOOTER

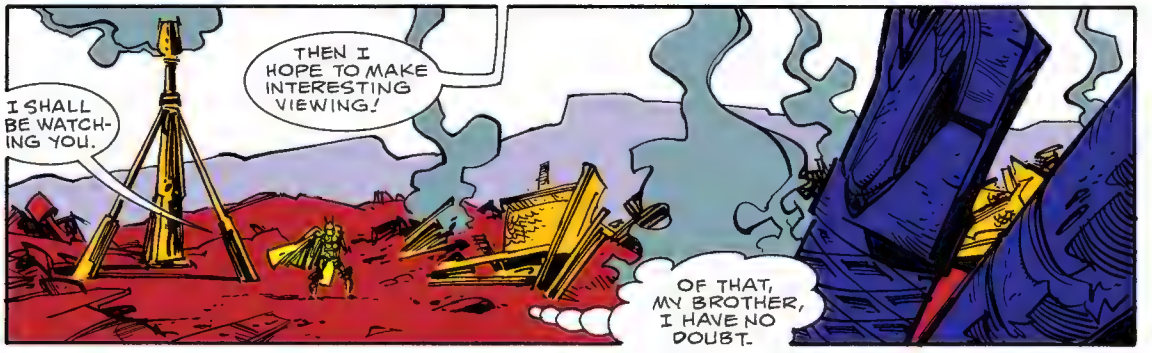

HE'S GONE!
LORD ODIN IS GONE!
UNBELIEVABLE BUT THOR IS RIGHT! EVEN MY MAGIC CAN SENSE NO TRACE OF THEM!
ODIN AND SURTUR NO LONGER EXIST ANYWHERE IN THE NINE WORLDS!
NOW AT LAST, MY TIME HAS COME TO-- WHAT??
FEAR NOT, FATHER!
THOUGH I MAY SPLIT ASGARD ASUNDER, BY THE POWER OF MY ENCHANTED HAMMER, I SHALL REOPEN THE FIERY PATH TO MUSPELHEIM...
NO!
THRWAAHM!
...AND FIND THEE!
THOR! THOR! CEASE THIS FRUITLESS EFFORT ERE IT IS TOO LATE! YOU CANNOT HELP OUR FATHER NOW!
UNHAND ME, TRAITOR!
ODIN LIES SOMEWHERE WITH HIS FOE IN THE DEPTHS OF MUSPELHEIM AND NOTHING SHALL PREVENT ME FROM SEEKING HIM OUT!

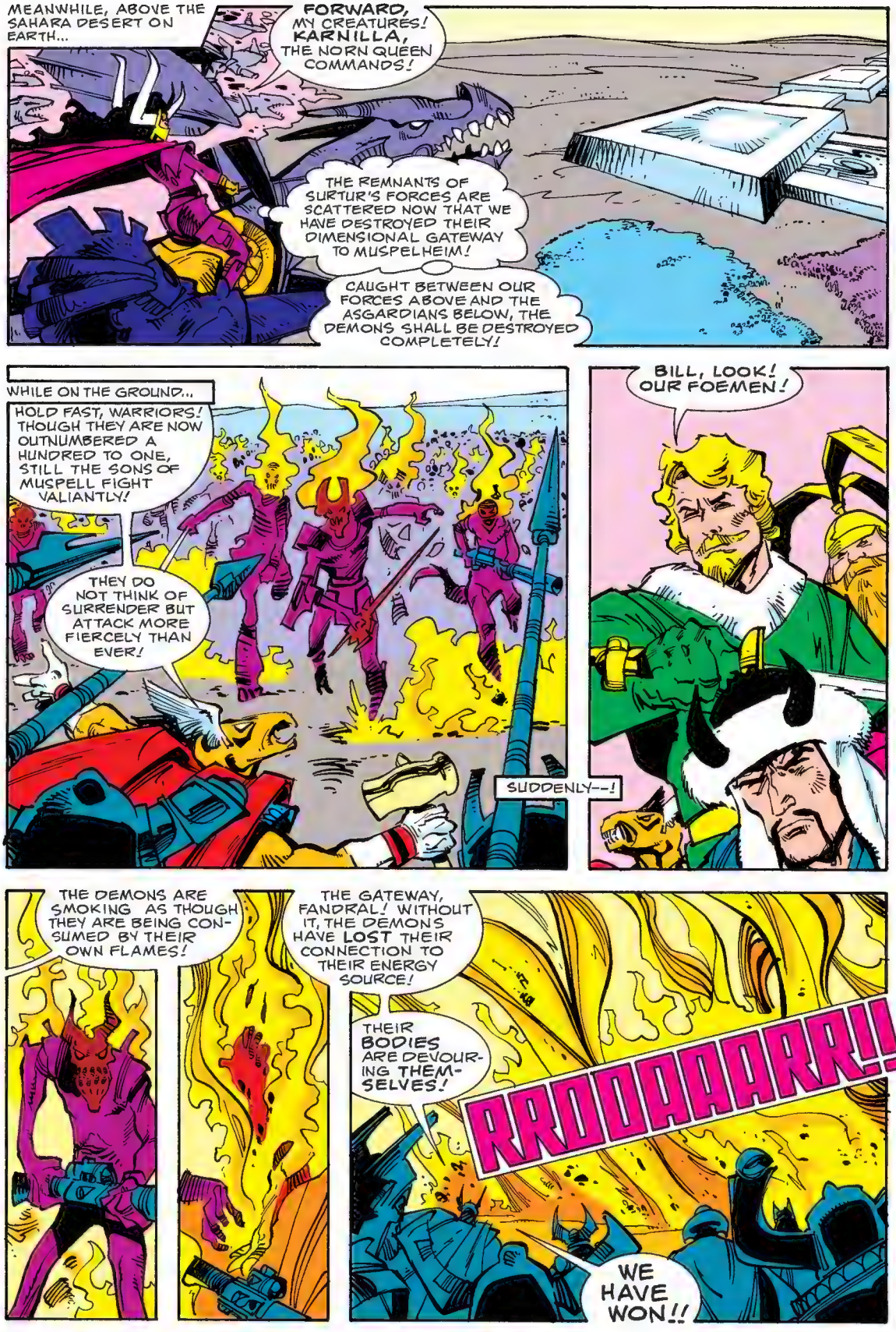

KRAK!
UGGH!
SOMETIMES, THOR, I DESPAIR OF YOU. IS THIS HOW YOU REPAY YOUR DEBTS OF GRATITUDE?
WITHOUT MY HELP, NEITHER YOU NOR ODIN COULD HAVE PREVENTED SURTUR FROM DESTROYING EVERYTHING.
AS FOR OUR FATHER, I THINK HE IS NOT DEAD FOR HIS POWER WOULD HAVE PASSED TO US AS HIS BROTHERS' PASSED TO HIM!
THOR #349.

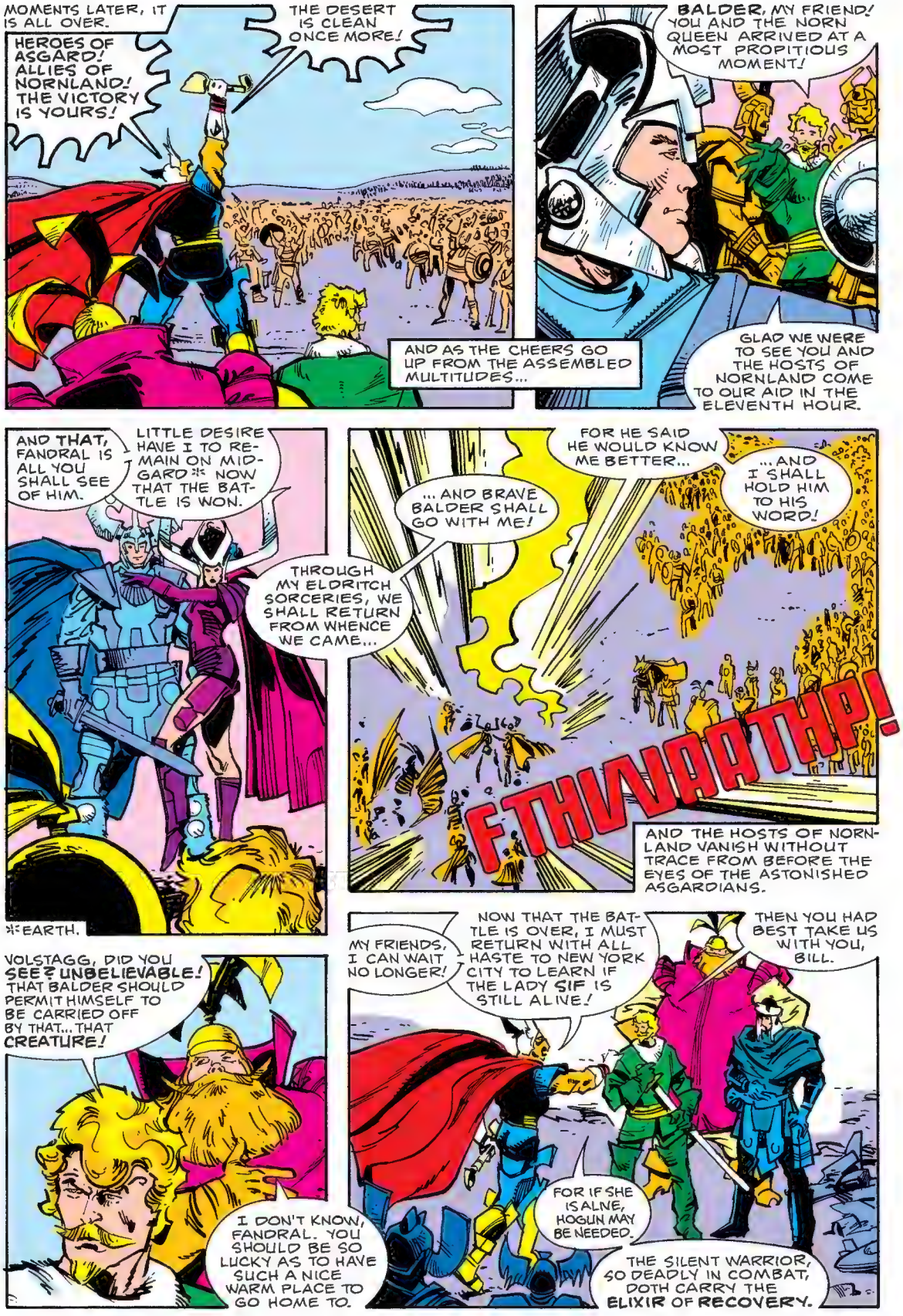

IF INDEED ODIN AND SURTUR RETURNED TO MUSPELHEIM, THEN ONLY ODIN'S POWER PREVENTS SURTUR FROM BREAKING INTO THE NINE WORLDS AGAIN!
SHOULD YOU REOPEN THE GATEWAY TO THAT DEADLY REALM, YOU MAY EVEN RELEASE THE DEMON...
...AND THEREBY UNDO ALL THAT WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED!


SO THINK CAREFULLY, BEFORE YOU RECKLESSLY BLAST YOUR WAY INTO MUSPELHEIM!
USE WHAT LITTLE BRAINS YOU HAVE, BROTHER.

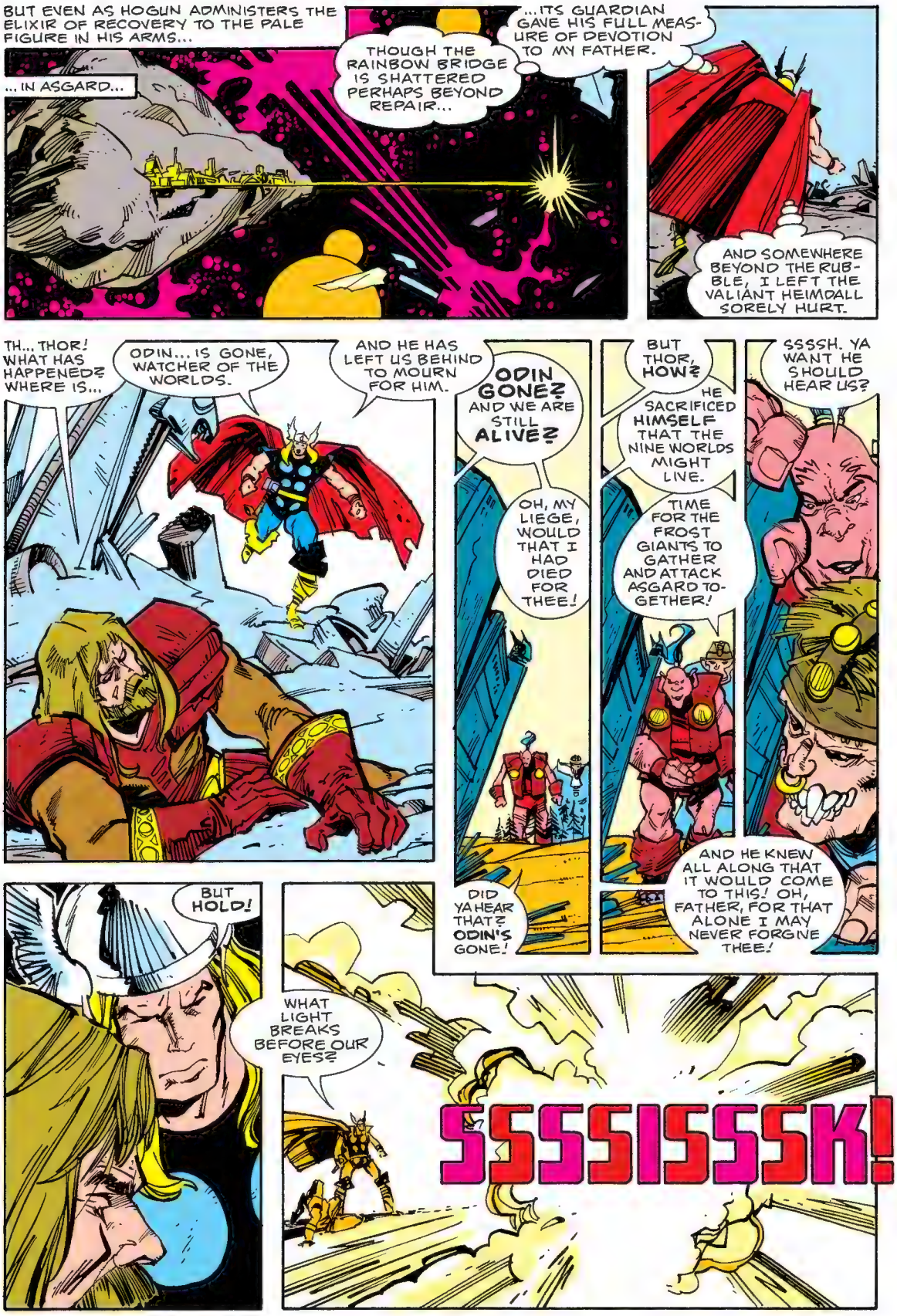

IT TAKES NO BRAINS, LOKI, TO SEE WHERE YOUR THOUGHTS ARE ALREADY TURNING.
EVEN YOU MUST HAVE REALIZED THAT SURTUR MEANT DESTRUCTION FOR US ALL...
...AND WHO WOULD RULE A SMOKING RUIN?
YET THERE IS TRUTH IN WHAT YOU SAY FOR ONCE. I DO OWE YOU A DEBT OF GRATITUDE.
AND THE ODIN-POWER HAS NOT RETURNED TO ASGARD.
BUT KNOW THIS, BROTHER, AS YOU PLOT BEHIND YOUR EYES!

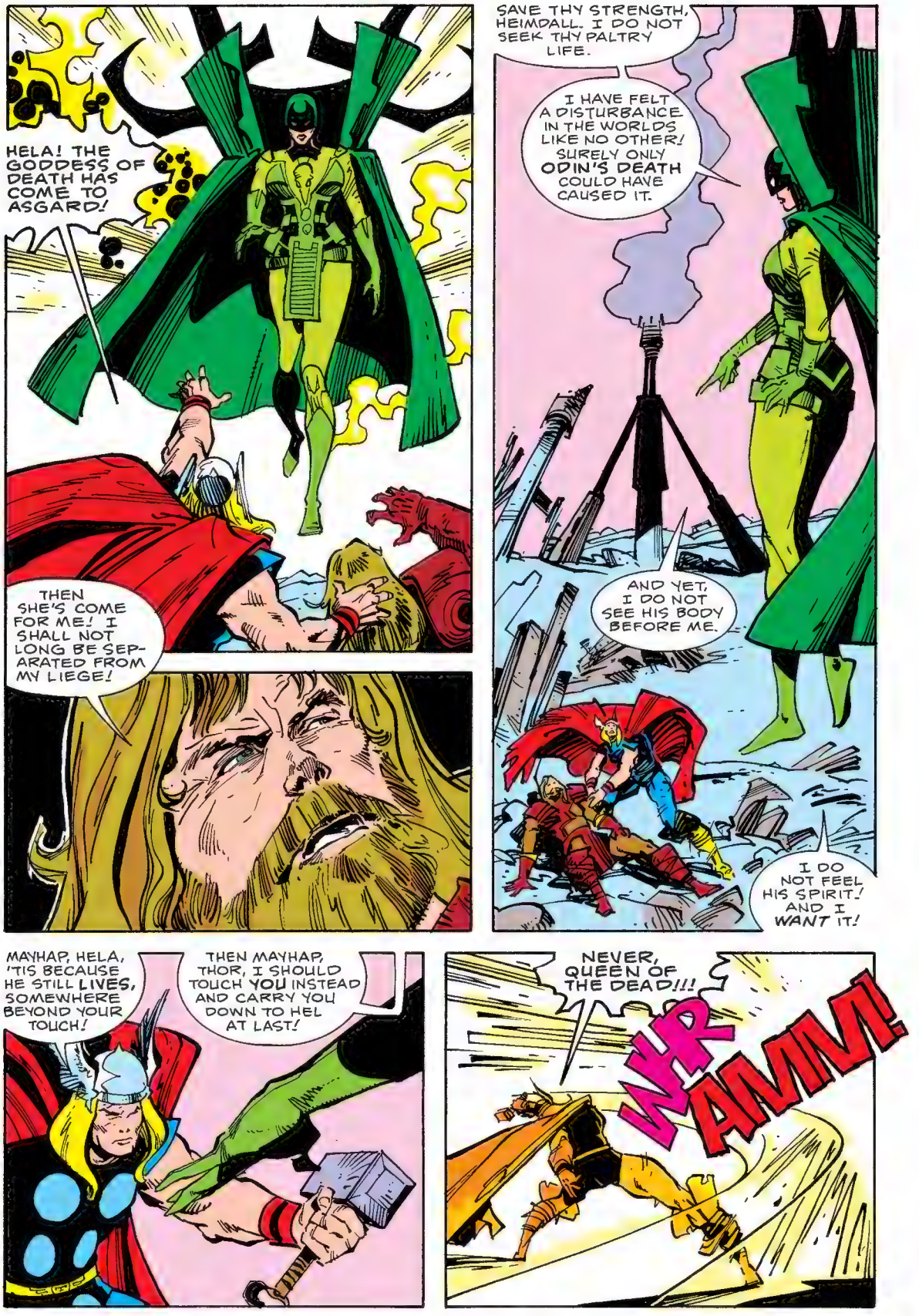

I SHALL BE WATCHING YOU.
THEN I HOPE TO MAKE INTERESTING VIEWING!
OF THAT, MY BROTHER, I HAVE NO DOUBT.

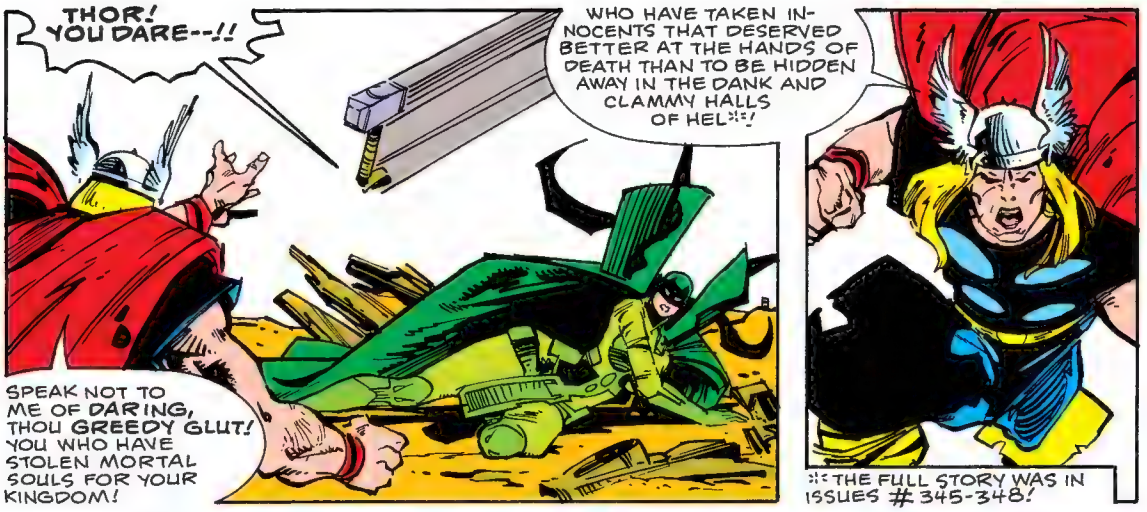

MEANWHILE, ABOVE THE SAHARA DESERT ON EARTH...
FORWARD, MY CREATURES! KARNILLA, THE NORN QUEEN COMMANDS!
THE REMNANTS OF SURTUR'S FORCES ARE SCATTERED NOW THAT WE HAVE DESTROYED THEIR DIMENSIONAL GATEWAY TO MUSPELHEIM!
CAUGHT BETWEEN OUR FORCES ABOVE AND THE ASGARDIANS BELOW, THE DEMONS SHALL BE DESTROYED COMPLETELY!
WHILE ON THE GROUND...
HOLD FAST, WARRIORS! THOUGH THEY ARE NOW OUTNUMBERED A HUNDRED TO ONE, STILL THE SONS OF MUSPELL FIGHT VALIANTLY!
THEY DO NOT THINK OF SURRENDER BUT ATTACK MORE FIERCELY THAN EVER!
SUDDENLY--!
BILL, LOOK! OUR FOEMEN!
THE DEMONS ARE SMOKING AS THOUGH THEY ARE BEING CONSUMED BY THEIR OWN FLAMES!
THE GATEWAY, FANDRAL! WITHOUT IT, THE DEMONS HAVE LOST THEIR CONNECTION TO THEIR ENERGY SOURCE!
THEIR BODIES ARE DEVOURING THEMSELVES!
RRODAAARR!!
WE HAVE WON!!

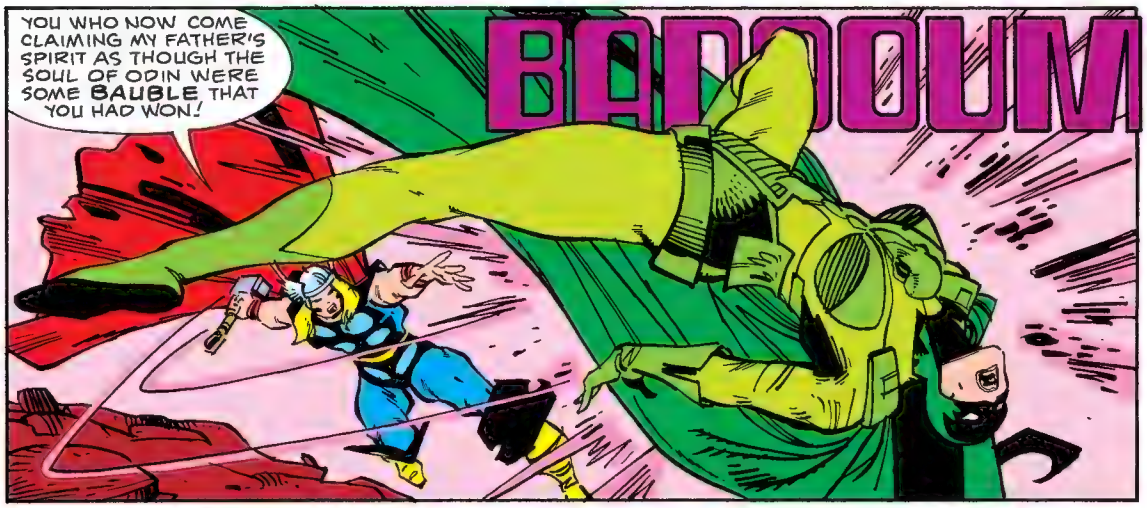

MOMENTS LATER, IT IS ALL OVER.
HEROES OF ASGARD! ALLIES OF NORNLAND! THE VICTORY IS YOURS!
THE DESERT IS CLEAN ONCE MORE!
AND AS THE CHEERS GO UP FROM THE ASSEMBLED MULTITUDES...
BALDER, MY FRIEND! YOU AND THE NORN QUEEN ARRIVED AT A MOST PROPITIOUS MOMENT!
GLAD WE WERE TO SEE YOU AND THE HOSTS OF NORNLAND COME TO OUR AID IN THE ELEVENTH HOUR.
AND THAT, FANDRAL IS ALL YOU SHALL SEE OF HIM.
LITTLE DESIRE HAVE I TO REMAIN ON MIDGARD* NOW THAT THE BATTLE IS WON.
THROUGH MY ELDRITCH SORCERIES, WE SHALL RETURN FROM WHENCE WE CAME...
*EARTH.
... AND BRAVE BALDER SHALL GO WITH ME!
FOR HE SAID HE WOULD KNOW ME BETTER...
...AND I SHALL HOLD HIM TO HIS WORD!
FTHWAATHP!
AND THE HOSTS OF NORNLAND VANISH WITHOUT TRACE FROM BEFORE THE EYES OF THE ASTONISHED ASGARDIANS.
VOLSTAGG, DID YOU SEE? UNBELIEVABLE! THAT BALDER SHOULD PERMIT HIMSELF TO BE CARRIED OFF BY THAT... THAT CREATURE!
I DON'T KNOW, FANDRAL. YOU SHOULD BE SO LUCKY AS TO HAVE SUCH A NICE WARM PLACE TO GO HOME TO.
MY FRIENDS, I CAN WAIT NO LONGER!
NOW THAT THE BATTLE IS OVER, I MUST RETURN WITH ALL HASTE TO NEW YORK CITY TO LEARN IF THE LADY SIF IS STILL ALIVE!
THEN YOU HAD BEST TAKE US WITH YOU, BILL.
FOR IF SHE IS ALIVE, HOGUN MAY BE NEEDED.
THE SILENT WARRIOR, SO DEADLY IN COMBAT, DOTH CARRY THE ELIXIR OF RECOVERY.

NEW YORK CITY IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE DEMON INVASIONS*
INCREDIBLE HOW THE DEMONS' BODIES SUDDENLY VANISHED, SIR!
SURE MADE FINDING THE WOUNDED EASIER!
I THINK WE'RE LOSING HER, COLONEL SAULEDA.
BUT I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THIS ONE. SHE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE RESPONDING TO ANYTHING WE DO.
*THOR #350.
SIR, LOOK! IT'S BETA RAY BILL!
BILL, BELOW US! 'TIS--
SIF!
EASY, SIR. SHE'S BADLY HURT!
BUT SHE'S ALIVE! HOGUN!
FEAR NOT, BILL. WE HAVE COME IN TIME!


BUT EVEN AS HOGUN ADMINISTERS THE ELIXIR OF RECOVERY TO THE PALE FIGURE IN HIS ARMS...
...IN ASGARD...
THOUGH THE RAINBOW BRIDGE IS SHATTERED PERHAPS BEYOND REPAIR...
...ITS GUARDIAN GAVE HIS FULL MEASURE OF DEVOTION TO MY FATHER.
AND SOMEWHERE BEYOND THE RUBBLE, I LEFT THE VALIANT HEIMDALL SORELY HURT.
TH... THOR! WHAT HAS HAPPENED? WHERE IS...
ODIN... IS GONE, WATCHER OF THE WORLDS.
AND HE HAS LEFT US BEHIND TO MOURN FOR HIM.
ODIN GONE? AND WE ARE STILL ALIVE?
OH, MY LIEGE, WOULD THAT I HAD DIED FOR THEE!
DID YA HEAR THAT? ODIN'S GONE!
BUT THOR, HOW?
HE SACRIFICED HIMSELF THAT THE NINE WORLDS MIGHT LIVE.
TIME FOR THE FROST GIANTS TO GATHER AND ATTACK ASGARD TOGETHER!
SSSSH. YA WANT HE SHOULD HEAR US?
AND HE KNEW ALL ALONG THAT IT WOULD COME TO THIS! OH, FATHER, FOR THAT ALONE I MAY NEVER FORGIVE THEE!
BUT HOLD!
WHAT LIGHT BREAKS BEFORE OUR EYES?
SSSSISSSK!

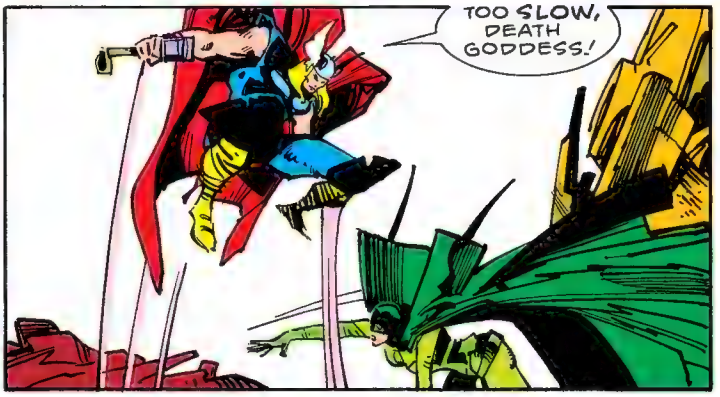

HELA! THE GODDESS OF DEATH HAS COME TO ASGARD!
THEN SHE'S COME FOR ME! I SHALL NOT LONG BE SEPARATED FROM MY LIEGE!
SAVE THY STRENGTH, HEIMDALL. I DO NOT SEEK THY PALTRY LIFE.
I HAVE FELT A DISTURBANCE IN THE WORLDS LIKE NO OTHER! SURELY ONLY ODIN'S DEATH COULD HAVE CAUSED IT.
AND YET, I DO NOT SEE HIS BODY BEFORE ME.
I DO NOT FEEL HIS SPIRIT! AND I WANT IT!
MAYHAP, HELA, 'TIS BECAUSE HE STILL LIVES, SOMEWHERE BEYOND YOUR TOUCH!
THEN MAYHAP, THOR, I SHOULD TOUCH YOU INSTEAD AND CARRY YOU DOWN TO HEL AT LAST!
NEVER, QUEEN OF THE DEAD!!!
WHAMM!

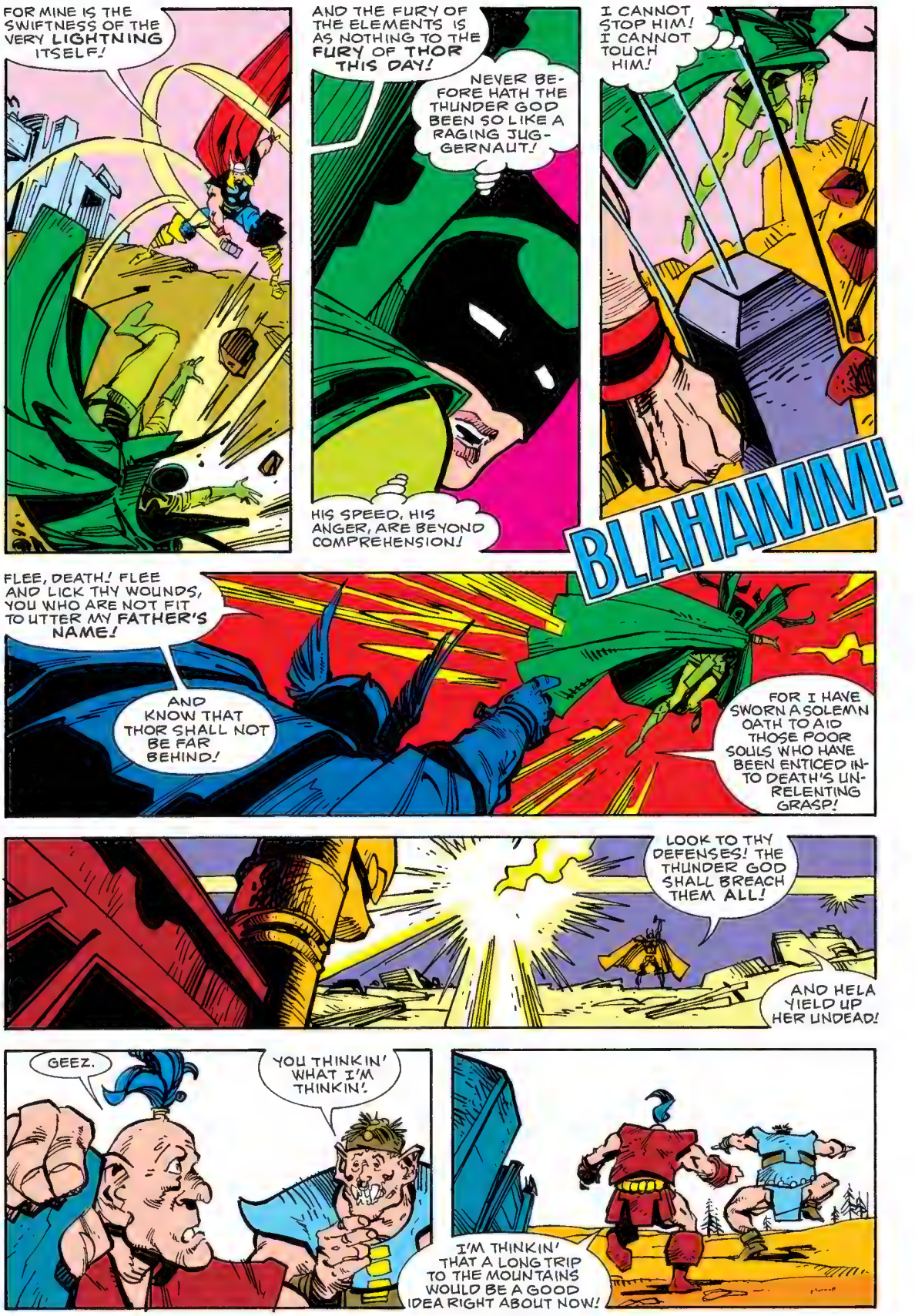

THOR! YOU DARE--!!
WHO HAVE TAKEN INNOCENTS THAT DESERVED BETTER AT THE HANDS OF DEATH THAN TO BE HIDDEN AWAY IN THE DANK AND CLAMMY HALLS OF HEL*!
SPEAK NOT TO ME OF DARING, THOU GREEDY GLUT! YOU WHO HAVE STOLEN MORTAL SOULS FOR YOUR KINGDOM!
* THE FULL STORY WAS IN ISSUES #345-348!

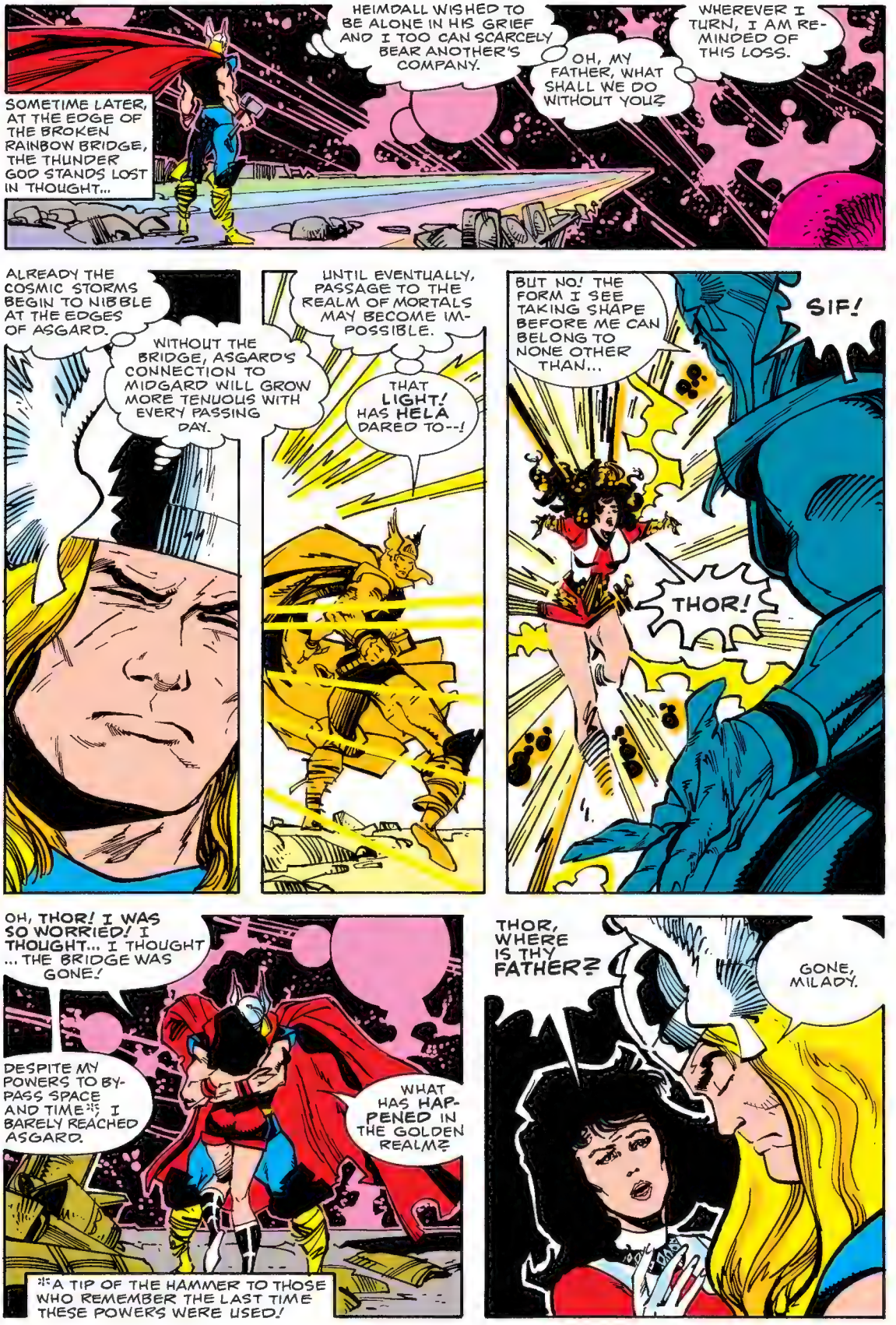

YOU WHO NOW COME CLAIMING MY FATHER'S SPIRIT AS THOUGH THE SOUL OF ODIN WERE SOME BAUBLE THAT YOU HAD WON!
BADOOUM

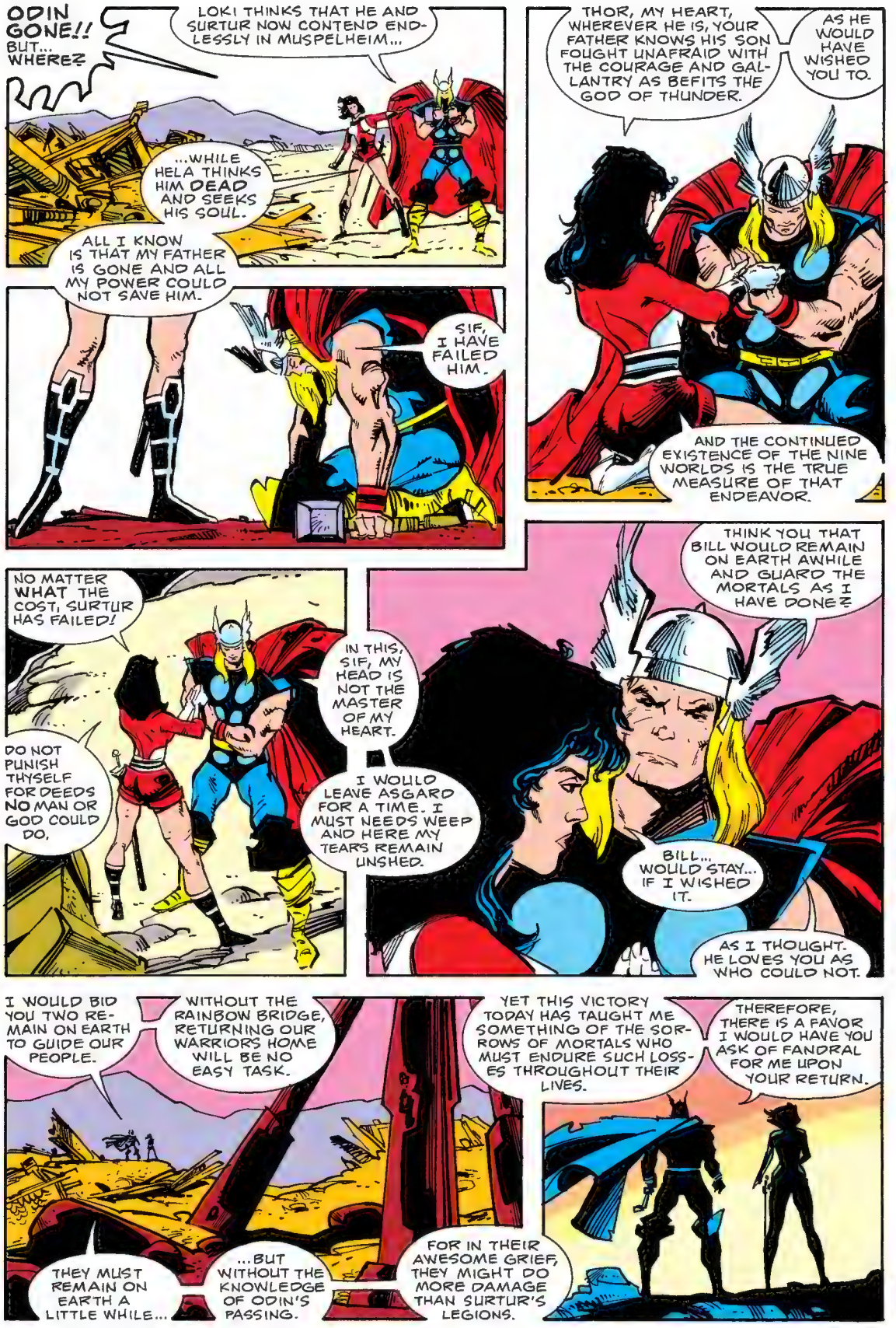
MY FATHER MAY LIVE OR HE MAY NOT!
BUT HIS SOUL SHALL NEVER BE THINE!

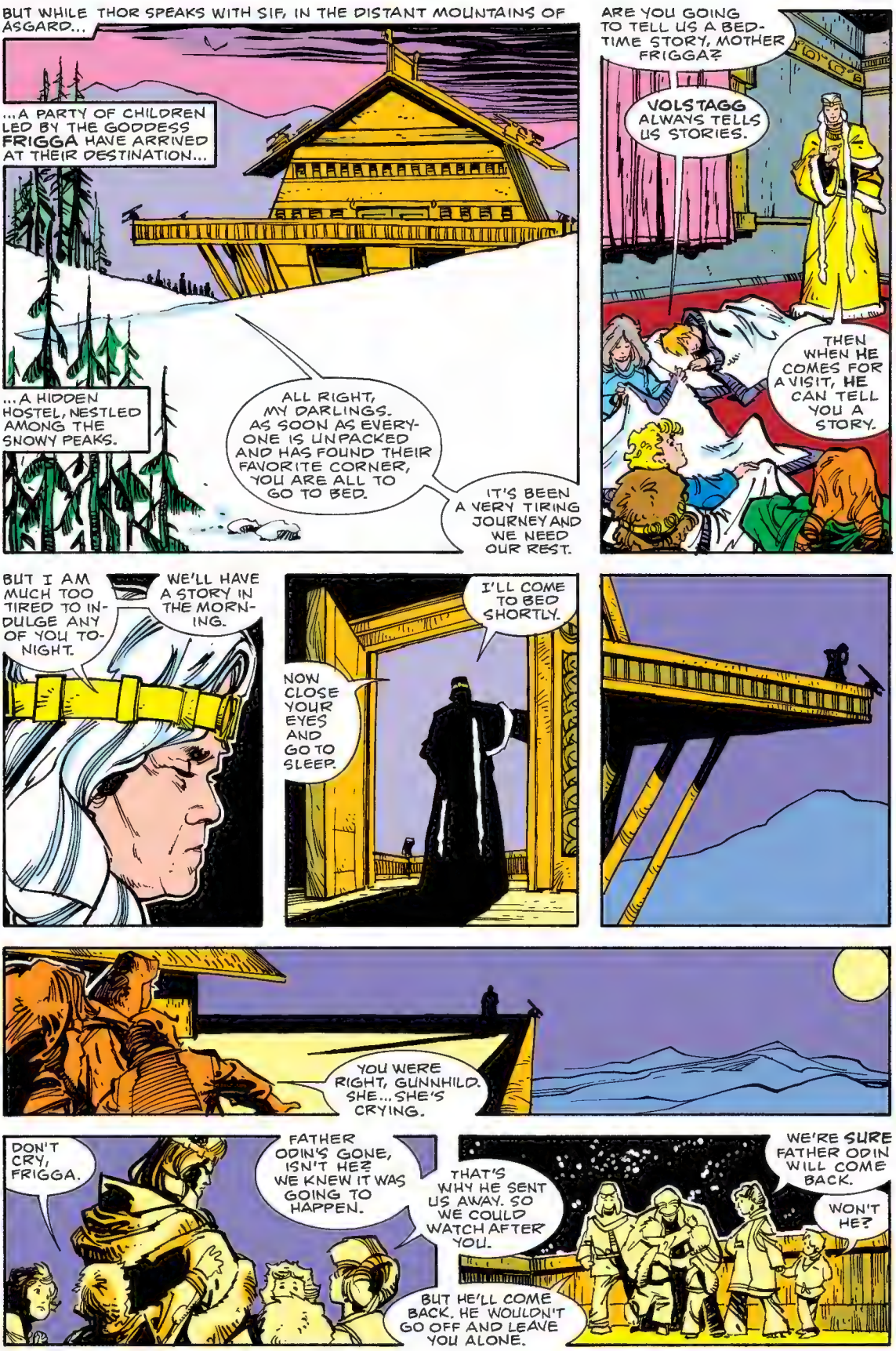
PERHAPS NOT, THOR, BUT YOURS SHALL BE WITH JUST A TOUCH!

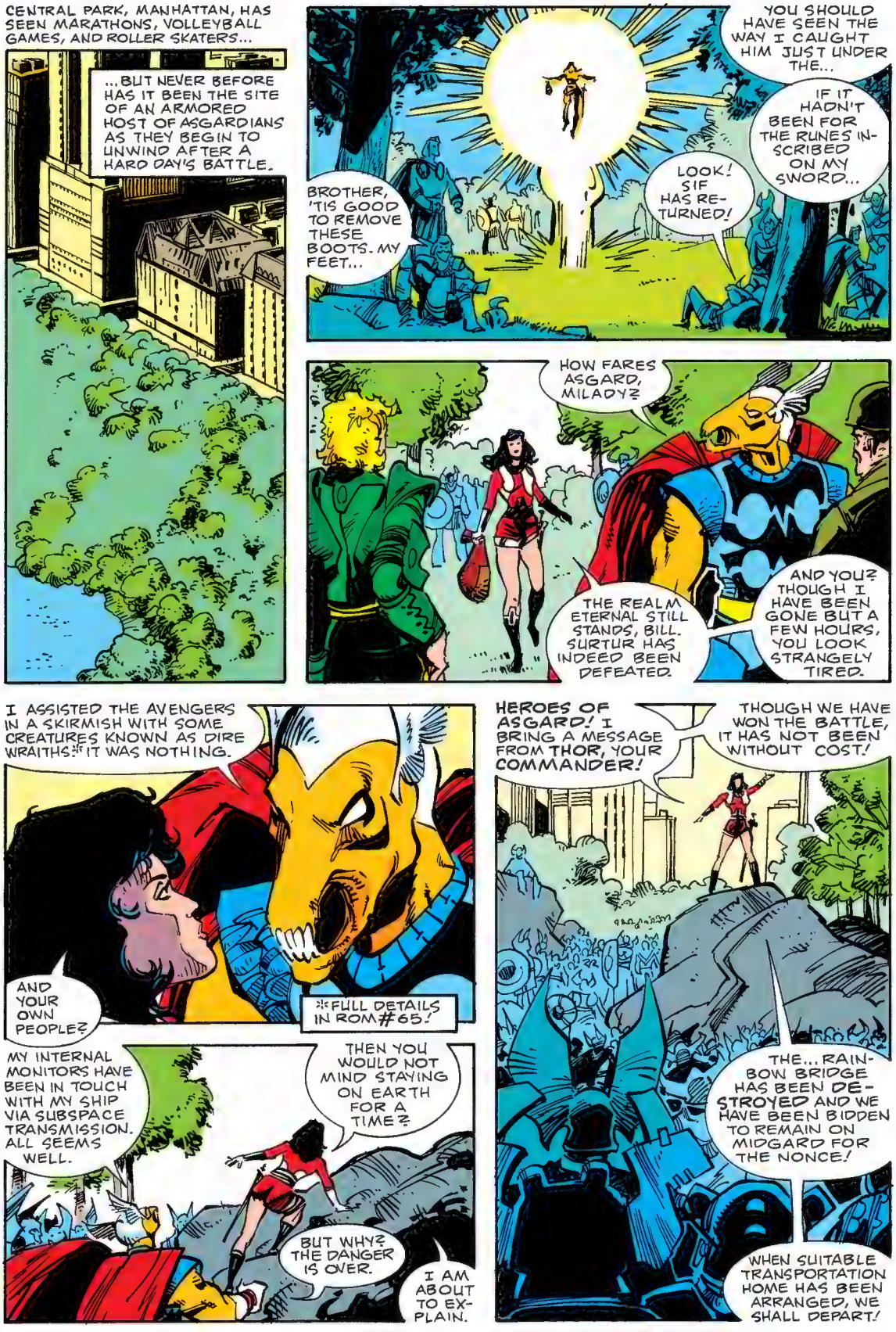

TOO SLOW, DEATH GODDESS!

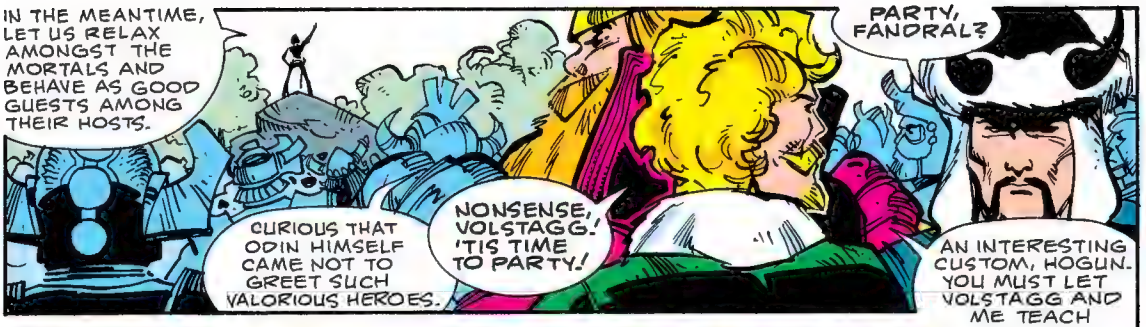

FOR MINE IS THE SWIFTNESS OF THE VERY LIGHTNING ITSELF!
AND THE FURY OF THE ELEMENTS IS AS NOTHING TO THE FURY OF THOR THIS DAY!
NEVER BEFORE HATH THE THUNDER GOD BEEN SO LIKE A RAGING JUGGERNAUT!
HIS SPEED, HIS ANGER, ARE BEYOND COMPREHENSION!
I CANNOT STOP HIM! I CANNOT TOUCH HIM!
BLAHAMM!
FLEE, DEATH! FLEE AND LICK THY WOUNDS, YOU WHO ARE NOT FIT TO UTTER MY FATHER'S NAME!
AND KNOW THAT THOR SHALL NOT BE FAR BEHIND!
FOR I HAVE SWORN A SOLEMN OATH TO AID THOSE POOR SOULS WHO HAVE BEEN ENTICED INTO DEATH'S UNRELENTING GRASP!
LOOK TO THY DEFENSES! THE THUNDER GOD SHALL BREACH THEM ALL!
AND HELA YIELD UP HER UNDEAD!
GEEZ.
YOU THINKIN' WHAT I'M THINKIN'!
I'M THINKIN' THAT A LONG TRIP TO THE MOUNTAINS WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA RIGHT ABOUT NOW!


SOMETIME LATER, AT THE EDGE OF THE BROKEN RAINBOW BRIDGE, THE THUNDER GOD STANDS LOST IN THOUGHT...
HEIMDALL WISHED TO BE ALONE IN HIS GRIEF AND I TOO CAN SCARCELY BEAR ANOTHER'S COMPANY.
OH, MY FATHER, WHAT SHALL WE DO WITHOUT YOU?
WHEREVER I TURN, I AM REMINDED OF THIS LOSS.
ALREADY THE COSMIC STORMS BEGIN TO NIBBLE AT THE EDGES OF ASGARD.
WITHOUT THE BRIDGE, ASGARD'S CONNECTION TO MIDGARD WILL GROW MORE TENUOUS WITH EVERY PASSING DAY.
UNTIL EVENTUALLY, PASSAGE TO THE REALM OF MORTALS MAY BECOME IMPOSSIBLE.
THAT LIGHT! HAS HELA DARED TO--!
BUT NO! THE FORM I SEE TAKING SHAPE BEFORE ME CAN BELONG TO NONE OTHER THAN...
SIF!
THOR!
OH, THOR! I WAS SO WORRIED! I THOUGHT... I THOUGHT ... THE BRIDGE WAS GONE!
DESPITE MY POWERS TO BYPASS SPACE AND TIME*, I BARELY REACHED ASGARD.
WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE GOLDEN REALM?
*A TIP OF THE HAMMER TO THOSE WHO REMEMBER THE LAST TIME THESE POWERS WERE USED!
THOR, WHERE IS THY FATHER?
GONE, MILADY.


ODIN GONE!! BUT... WHERE?
LOKI THINKS THAT HE AND SURTUR NOW CONTEND ENDLESSLY IN MUSPELHEIM...
...WHILE HELA THINKS HIM DEAD AND SEEKS HIS SOUL.
ALL I KNOW IS THAT MY FATHER IS GONE AND ALL MY POWER COULD NOT SAVE HIM.
SIF, I HAVE FAILED HIM.
THOR, MY HEART, WHEREVER HE IS, YOUR FATHER KNOWS HIS SON FOUGHT UNAFRAID WITH THE COURAGE AND GALLANTRY AS BEFITS THE GOD OF THUNDER.
AS HE WOULD HAVE WISHED YOU TO.
AND THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF THE NINE WORLDS IS THE TRUE MEASURE OF THAT ENDEAVOR.
NO MATTER WHAT THE COST, SURTUR HAS FAILED!
DO NOT PUNISH THYSELF FOR DEEDS NO MAN OR GOD COULD DO.
IN THIS, SIF, MY HEAD IS NOT THE MASTER OF MY HEART.
I WOULD LEAVE ASGARD FOR A TIME. I MUST NEEDS WEEP AND HERE MY TEARS REMAIN UNSHED.
THINK YOU THAT BILL WOULD REMAIN ON EARTH AWHILE AND GUARD THE MORTALS AS I HAVE DONE?
BILL... WOULD STAY... IF I WISHED IT.
AS I THOUGHT. HE LOVES YOU AS WHO COULD NOT.
I WOULD BID YOU TWO REMAIN ON EARTH TO GUIDE OUR PEOPLE.
WITHOUT THE RAINBOW BRIDGE, RETURNING OUR WARRIORS HOME WILL BE NO EASY TASK.
YET THIS VICTORY TODAY HAS TAUGHT ME SOMETHING OF THE SORROWS OF MORTALS WHO MUST ENDURE SUCH LOSSES THROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES.
THEREFORE, THERE IS A FAVOR I WOULD HAVE YOU ASK OF FANDRAL FOR ME UPON YOUR RETURN.
THEY MUST REMAIN ON EARTH A LITTLE WHILE...
...BUT WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE OF ODIN'S PASSING.
FOR IN THEIR AWESOME GRIEF, THEY MIGHT DO MORE DAMAGE THAN SURTUR'S LEGIONS.

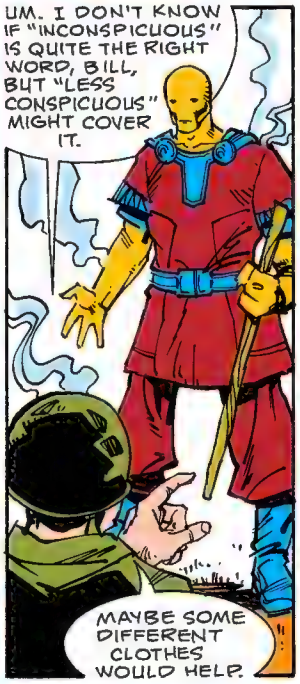

BUT WHILE THOR SPEAKS WITH SIF, IN THE DISTANT MOUNTAINS OF ASGARD...
...A PARTY OF CHILDREN LED BY THE GODDESS FRIGGA HAVE ARRIVED AT THEIR DESTINATION...
...A HIDDEN HOSTEL, NESTLED AMONG THE SNOWY PEAKS.
ALL RIGHT, MY DARLINGS. AS SOON AS EVERY-ONE IS UNPACKED AND HAS FOUND THEIR FAVORITE CORNER, YOU ARE ALL TO GO TO BED.
IT'S BEEN A VERY TIRING JOURNEY AND WE NEED OUR REST.
ARE YOU GOING TO TELL US A BED-TIME STORY, MOTHER FRIGGA?
VOLSTAGG ALWAYS TELLS US STORIES.
THEN WHEN HE COMES FOR A VISIT, HE CAN TELL YOU A STORY.
BUT I AM MUCH TOO TIRED TO IN-DULGE ANY OF YOU TO-NIGHT.
WE'LL HAVE A STORY IN THE MORN-ING.
I'LL COME TO BED SHORTLY.
NOW CLOSE YOUR EYES AND GO TO SLEEP.
YOU WERE RIGHT, GUNNHILD. SHE... SHE'S CRYING.
DON'T CRY, FRIGGA.
FATHER ODIN'S GONE, ISN'T HE? WE KNEW IT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN.
THAT'S WHY HE SENT US AWAY. SO WE COULD WATCH AFTER YOU.
BUT HE'LL COME BACK. HE WOULDN'T GO OFF AND LEAVE YOU ALONE.
WE'RE SURE FATHER ODIN WILL COME BACK.
WON'T HE?


CENTRAL PARK, MANHATTAN, HAS SEEN MARATHONS, VOLLEYBALL GAMES, AND ROLLER SKATERS...
...BUT NEVER BEFORE HAS IT BEEN THE SITE OF AN ARMORED HOST OF ASGARDIANS AS THEY BEGIN TO UNWIND AFTER A HARD DAY'S BATTLE.
BROTHER, 'TIS GOOD TO REMOVE THESE BOOTS. MY FEET...
LOOK! SIF HAS RETURNED!
YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN THE WAY I CAUGHT HIM JUST UNDER THE...
IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR THE RUNES INSCRIBED ON MY SWORD...
HOW FARES ASGARD, MILADY?
THE REALM ETERNAL STILL STANDS, BILL. SURTUR HAS INDEED BEEN DEFEATED.
AND YOU? THOUGH I HAVE BEEN GONE BUT A FEW HOURS, YOU LOOK STRANGELY TIRED.
I ASSISTED THE AVENGERS IN A SKIRMISH WITH SOME CREATURES KNOWN AS DIRE WRAITHS!* IT WAS NOTHING.
AND YOUR OWN PEOPLE?
*FULL DETAILS IN ROM #65!
MY INTERNAL MONITORS HAVE BEEN IN TOUCH WITH MY SHIP VIA SUBSPACE TRANSMISSION. ALL SEEMS WELL.
THEN YOU WOULD NOT MIND STAYING ON EARTH FOR A TIME?
BUT WHY? THE DANGER IS OVER.
I AM ABOUT TO EXPLAIN.
HEROES OF ASGARD! I BRING A MESSAGE FROM THOR, YOUR COMMANDER!
THOUGH WE HAVE WON THE BATTLE, IT HAS NOT BEEN WITHOUT COST!
THE... RAINBOW BRIDGE HAS BEEN DESTROYED AND WE HAVE BEEN BIDDEN TO REMAIN ON MIDGARD FOR THE NONCE!
WHEN SUITABLE TRANSPORTATION HOME HAS BEEN ARRANGED, WE SHALL DEPART!


IN THE MEANTIME, LET US RELAX AMONGST THE MORTALS AND BEHAVE AS GOOD GUESTS AMONG THEIR HOSTS.
CURIOUS THAT ODIN HIMSELF CAME NOT TO GREET SUCH VALORIOUS HEROES.
NONSENSE, VOLSTAGG! 'TIS TIME TO PARTY!
PARTY, FANDRAL?
AN INTERESTING CUSTOM, HOGUN. YOU MUST LET VOLSTAGG AND ME TEACH IT TO YOU SOMETIME.

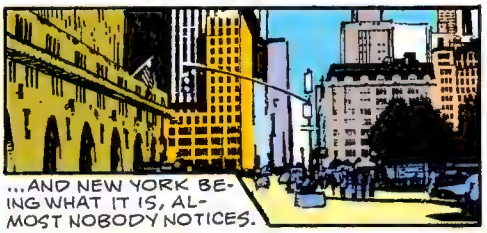
I WOULDN'T WORRY ABOUT IT, BILL. MY MEN AND I ARE HEADING HOME NOW THAT THE EXCITEMENT IS OVER...
...BUT I EXPECT MAYOR KOCH CAN BE PERSUADED TO ALLOW YOUR BOYS TO BIVOUAC HERE IN THE PARK UNTIL YOU CAN GET THEM HOME.
WHAT ABOUT YOU TWO?

I THINK, COLONEL SAULEDA, THAT I SHALL NEED TO MAKE MYSELF A LITTLE MORE INCONSPICUOUS DURING OUR STAY HERE.
...AND THANKS TO THE ENCHANTMENT OF ODIN WITHIN MY HAMMER...
FOOF!

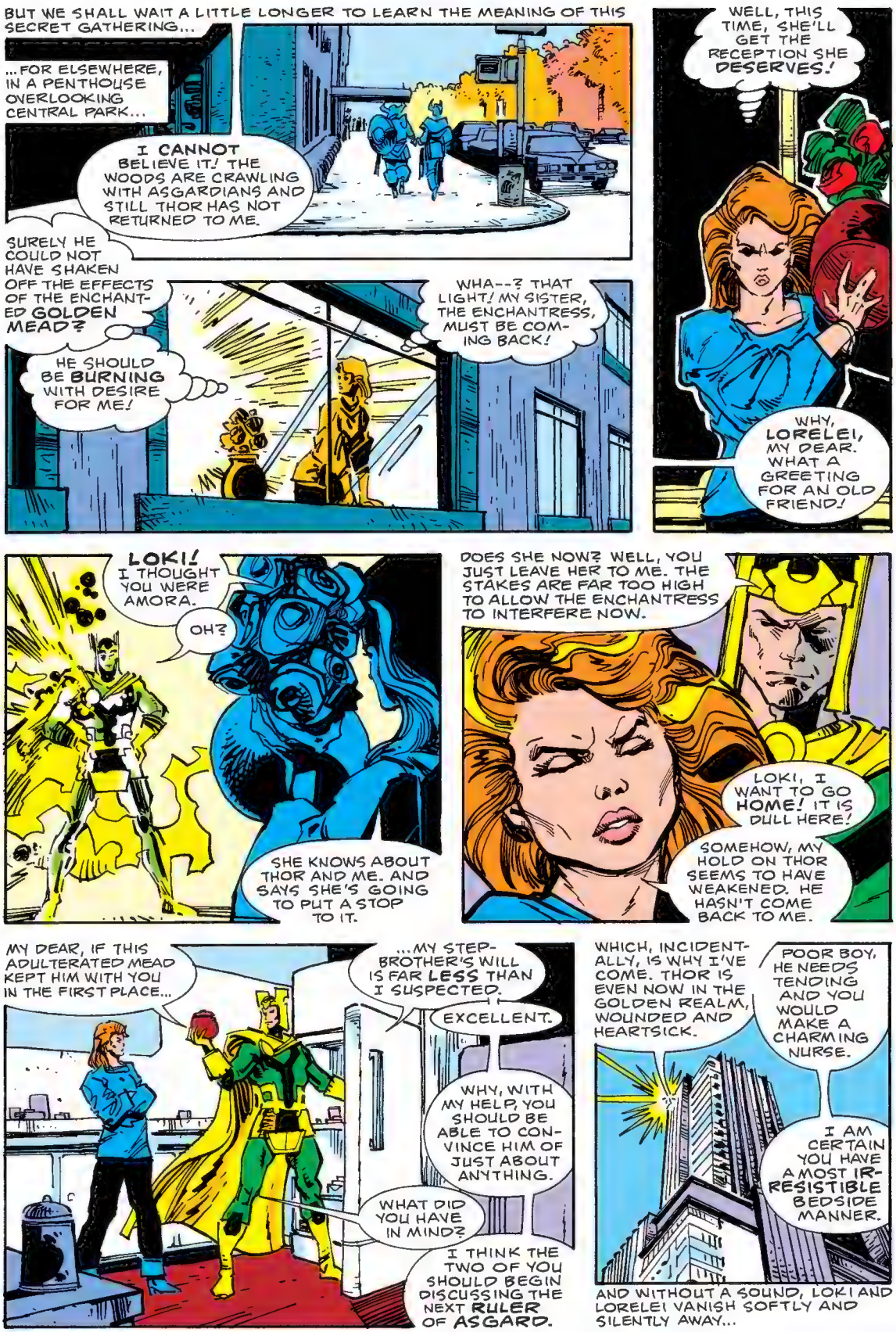

UM. I DON'T KNOW IF "INCONSPICUOUS" IS QUITE THE RIGHT WORD, BILL, BUT "LESS CONSPICUOUS" MIGHT COVER IT.
MAYBE SOME DIFFERENT CLOTHES WOULD HELP.

MILADY, WOULD YOU CARE TO ASSIST ME IN FINDING SOME?
CERTAINLY, BILL. JUST LET ME SPEAK WITH FANDRAL FIRST, AND WE SHALL BE ON OUR WAY.

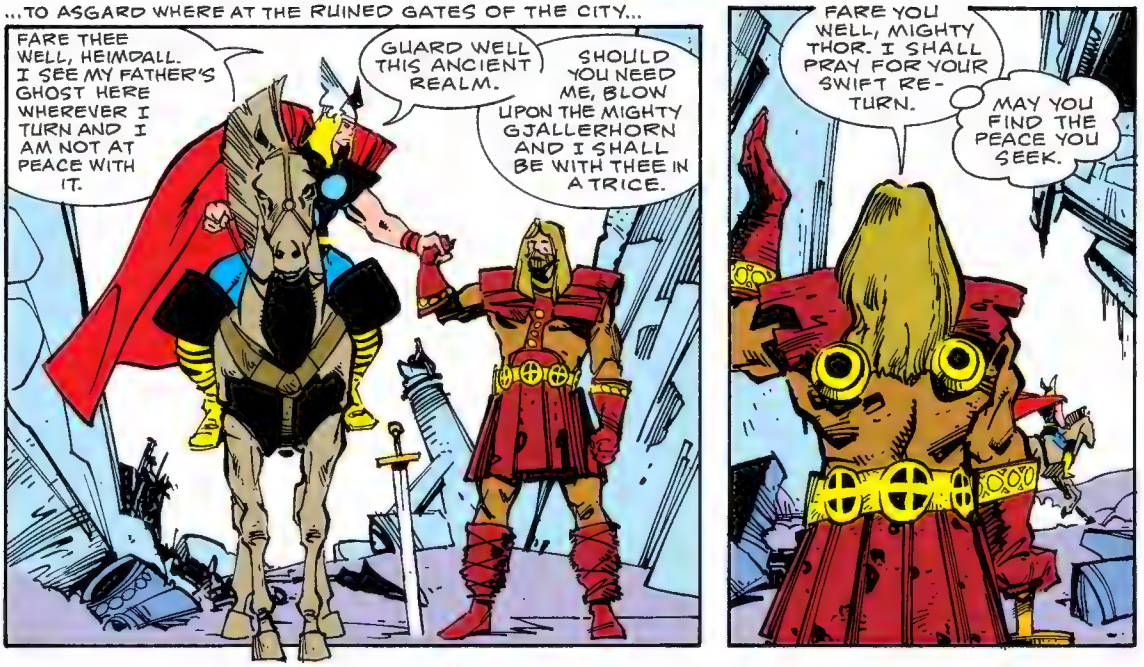
AND SO, A FEW MINUTES LATER, PAST GRAND ARMY PLAZA AT FIFTH AVENUE AND 59TH STREET WALK AN IMMORTAL WARRIOR WOMAN AND AN ALIEN WARRIOR CONSTRUCT...



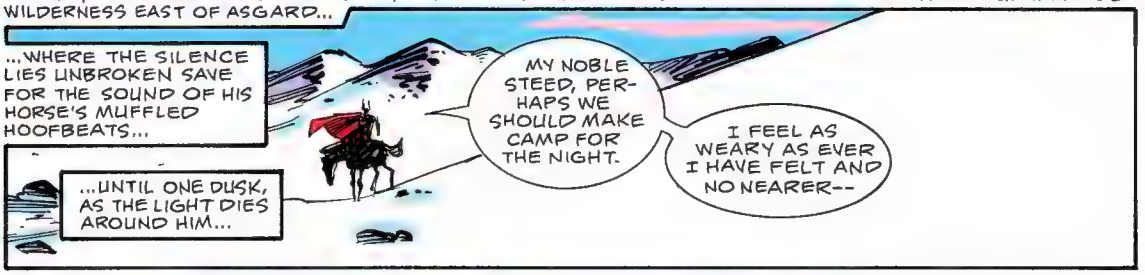
MEANWHILE, NOT FAR AWAY, A SMALL NUMBER OF MEN GATHER SILENTLY BEFORE A CLOSED-CIRCUIT MONITOR...
...AND LISTEN AS THE HARSH VOICE ISSUING FROM THE SPEAKERS TELLS THEM WHAT TO DO.
THE OPPORTUNITY IS PERFECT.
THE CITY IS STILL RECOVERING FROM THE SHOCKS OF THE PAST FEW DAYS.
NOW IS THE TIME TO STRIKE!


BUT WE SHALL WAIT A LITTLE LONGER TO LEARN THE MEANING OF THIS SECRET GATHERING...
...FOR ELSEWHERE, IN A PENTHOUSE OVERLOOKING CENTRAL PARK...
I CANNOT BELIEVE IT! THE WOODS ARE CRAWLING WITH ASGARDIANS AND STILL THOR HAS NOT RETURNED TO ME.
SURELY HE COULD NOT HAVE SHAKEN OFF THE EFFECTS OF THE ENCHANTED GOLDEN MEAD?
HE SHOULD BE BURNING WITH DESIRE FOR ME!
WHA--? THAT LIGHT! MY SISTER, THE ENCHANTRESS, MUST BE COMING BACK!
WELL, THIS TIME, SHE'LL GET THE RECEPTION SHE DESERVES!
WHY, LORELEI, MY DEAR. WHAT A GREETING FOR AN OLD FRIEND!
LOKI! I THOUGHT YOU WERE AMORA.
OH?
SHE KNOWS ABOUT THOR AND ME. AND SAYS SHE'S GOING TO PUT A STOP TO IT.
DOES SHE NOW? WELL, YOU JUST LEAVE HER TO ME. THE STAKES ARE FAR TOO HIGH TO ALLOW THE ENCHANTRESS TO INTERFERE NOW.
LOKI, I WANT TO GO HOME! IT IS DULL HERE!
SOMEHOW, MY HOLD ON THOR SEEMS TO HAVE WEAKENED. HE HASN'T COME BACK TO ME.
MY DEAR, IF THIS ADULTERATED MEAD KEPT HIM WITH YOU IN THE FIRST PLACE...
...MY STEPBROTHER'S WILL IS FAR LESS THAN I SUSPECTED.
EXCELLENT.
WHY, WITH MY HELP, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO CONVINCE HIM OF JUST ABOUT ANYTHING.
WHAT DID YOU HAVE IN MIND?
I THINK THE TWO OF YOU SHOULD BEGIN DISCUSSING THE NEXT RULER OF ASGARD.
WHICH, INCIDENTALLY, IS WHY I'VE COME. THOR IS EVEN NOW IN THE GOLDEN REALM, WOUNDED AND HEARTSICK.
POOR BOY. HE NEEDS TENDING AND YOU WOULD MAKE A CHARMING NURSE.
I AM CERTAIN YOU HAVE A MOST IRRESISTIBLE BEDSIDE MANNER.
AND WITHOUT A SOUND, LOKI AND LORELEI VANISH SOFTLY AND SILENTLY AWAY...

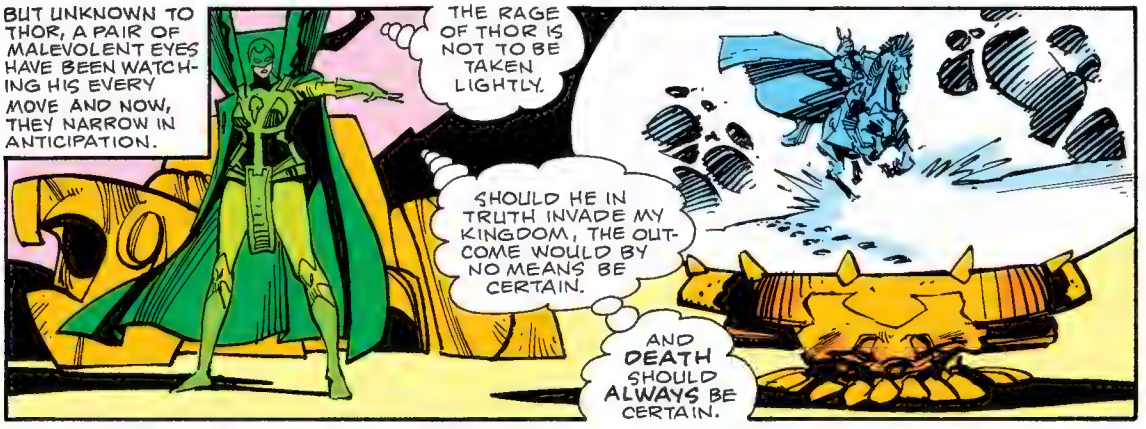
...TO ASGARD WHERE AT THE RUINED GATES OF THE CITY...

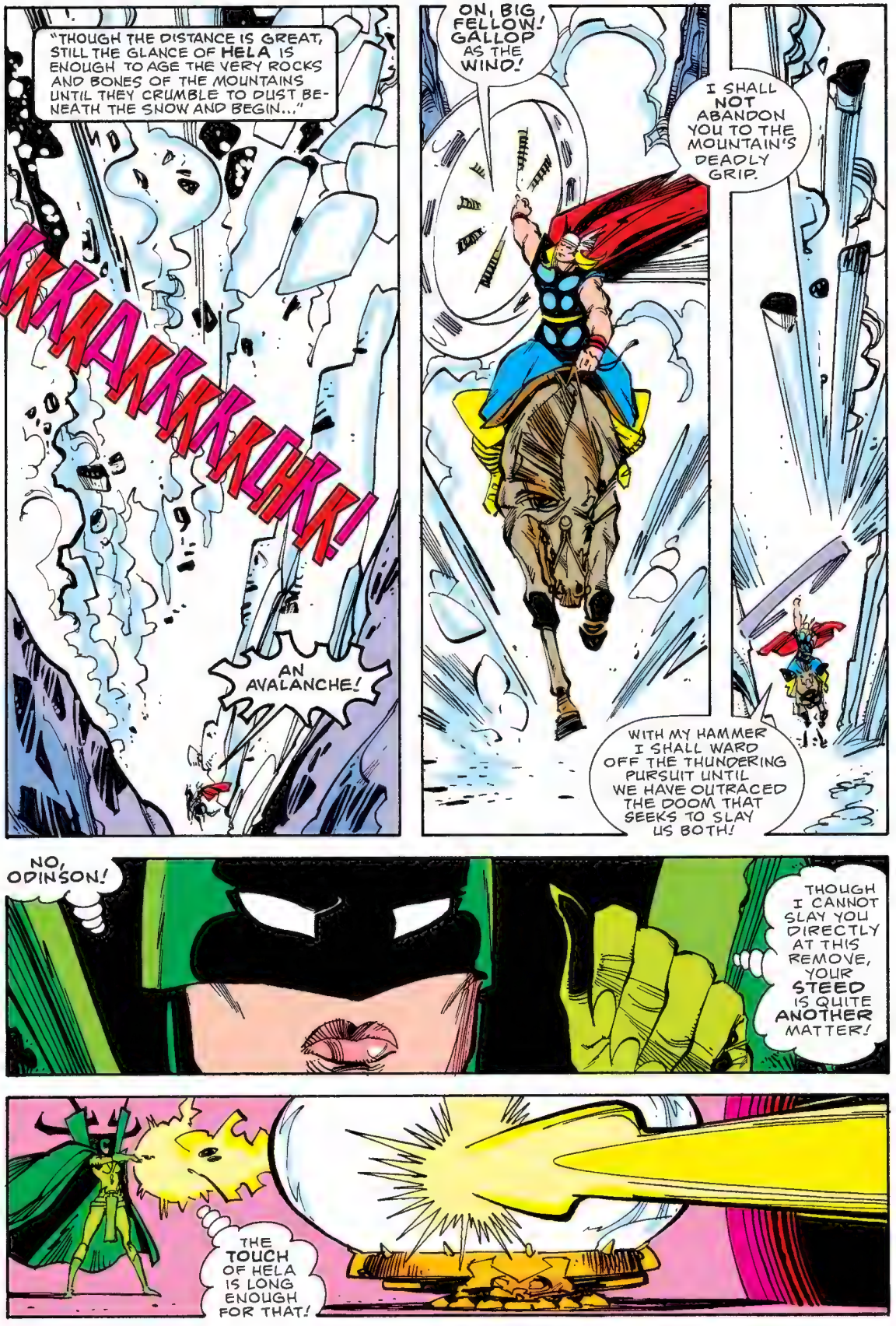

FARE THEE WELL, HEIMDALL. I SEE MY FATHER'S GHOST HERE WHEREVER I TURN AND I AM NOT AT PEACE WITH IT.
GUARD WELL THIS ANCIENT REALM.
SHOULD YOU NEED ME, BLOW UPON THE MIGHTY GJALLERHORN AND I SHALL BE WITH THEE IN A TRICE.
FARE YOU WELL, MIGHTY THOR. I SHALL PRAY FOR YOUR SWIFT RE-TURN.
MAY YOU FIND THE PEACE YOU SEEK.

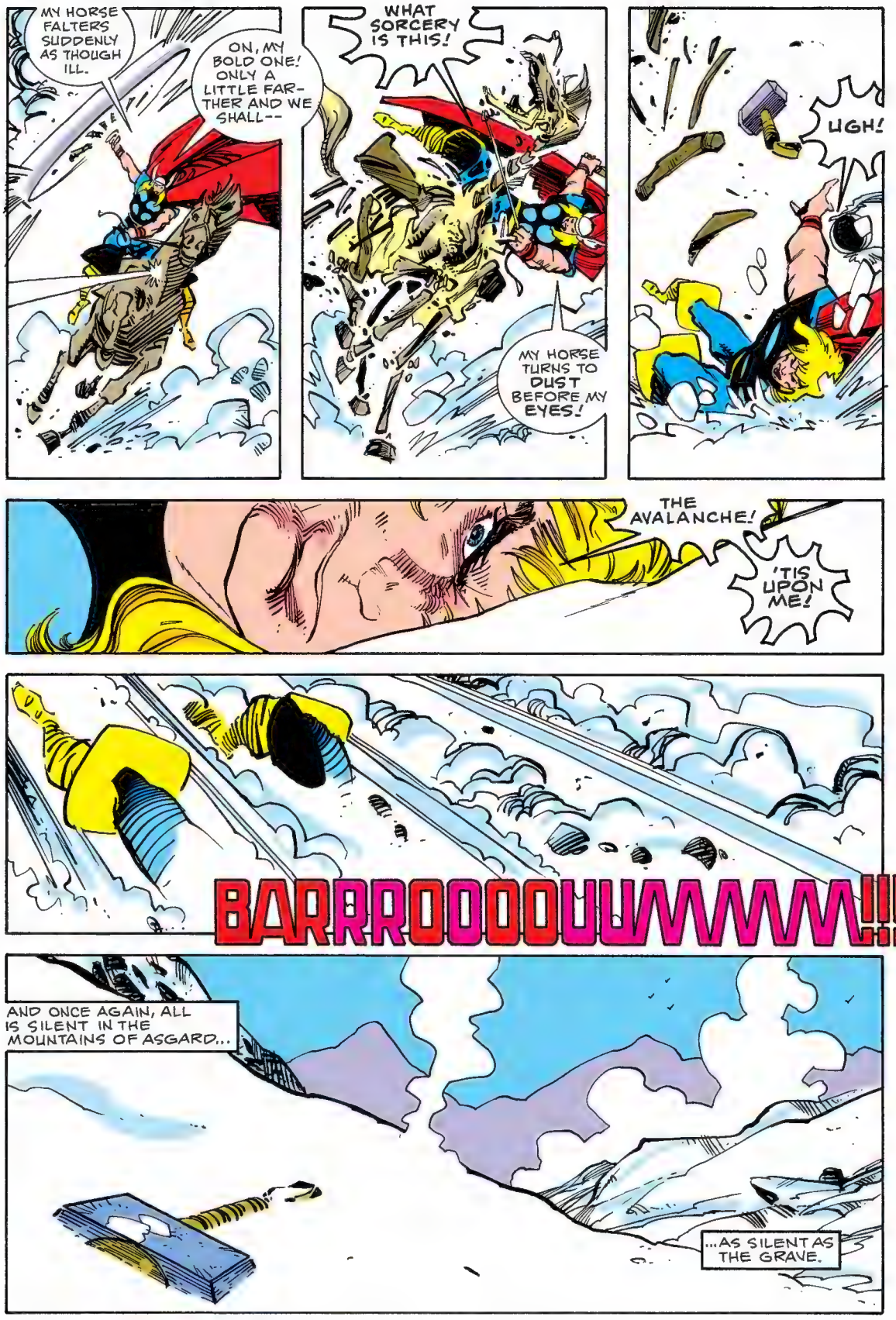
AND SO, WITH THE PASSING OF DAYS, THOR FINDS HIMSELF DEEPER AND DEEPER IN THE MOUNTAINOUS WILDERNESS EAST OF ASGARD...


...WHERE THE SILENCE LIES UNBROKEN SAVE FOR THE SOUND OF HIS HORSE'S MUFFLED HOOFBEATS...
...UNTIL ONE DUSK, AS THE LIGHT DIES AROUND HIM...
MY NOBLE STEED, PERHAPS WE SHOULD MAKE CAMP FOR THE NIGHT.
I FEEL AS WEARY AS EVER I HAVE FELT AND NO NEARER--

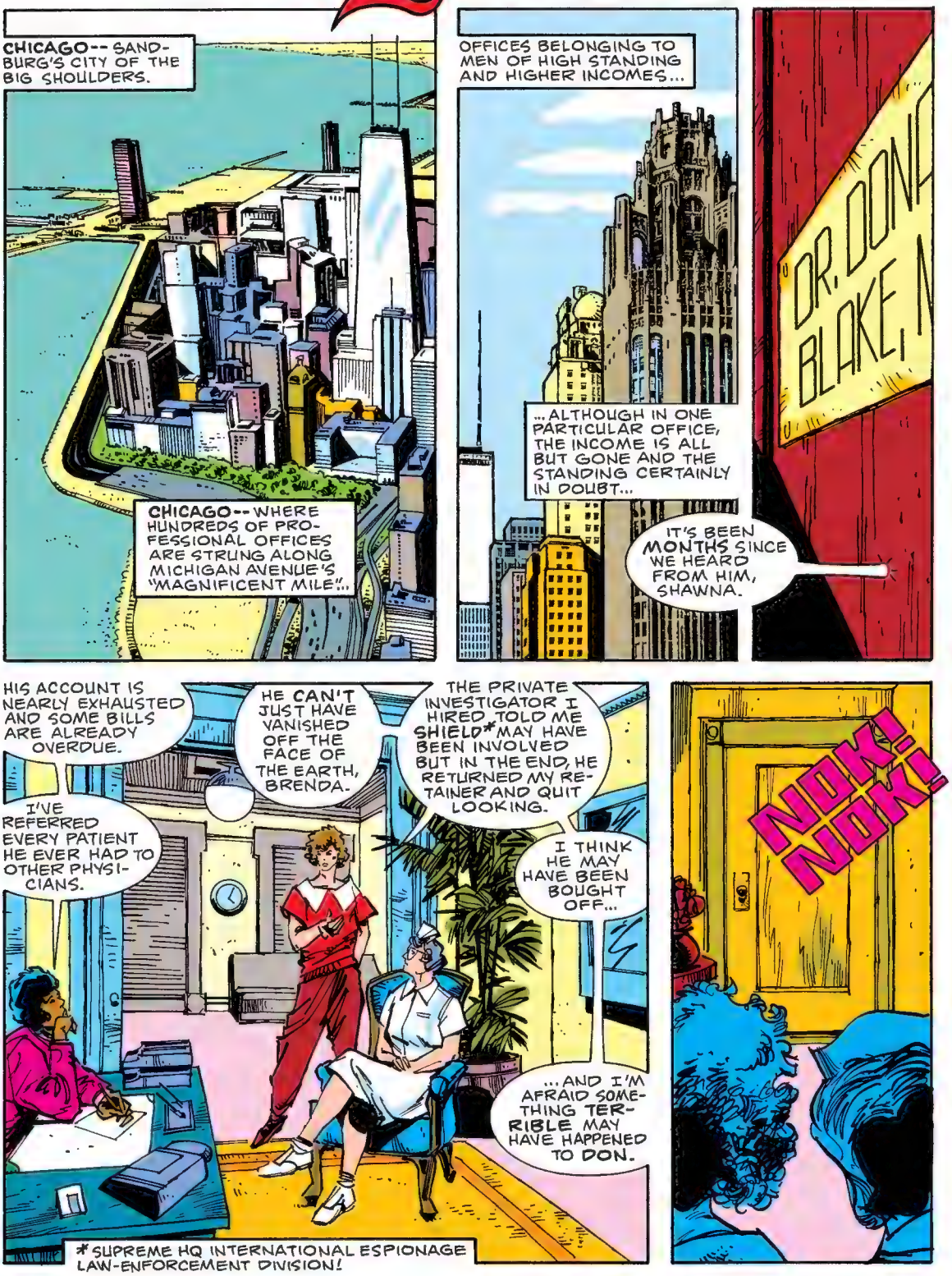
HOLD! WHAT ARE THESE? FOOTPRINTS IN THIS FORSAKEN REGION?
YET I WOULD HAVE SWORN THE SNOW WAS VIRGIN ONLY A MOMENT AGO.
COME, MY FRIEND. LET US FOLLOW ON A LITTLE WHILE WE CAN AND SEE IF WE CAN DISCOVER WHAT OTHER TRAVELER VENTURES SO FAR FROM HOME.


BUT UNKNOWN TO THOR, A PAIR OF MALEVOLENT EYES HAVE BEEN WATCHING HIS EVERY MOVE AND NOW, THEY NARROW IN ANTICIPATION.
THE RAGE OF THOR IS NOT TO BE TAKEN LIGHTLY.
SHOULD HE IN TRUTH INVADE MY KINGDOM, THE OUTCOME WOULD BY NO MEANS BE CERTAIN.
AND DEATH SHOULD ALWAYS BE CERTAIN.

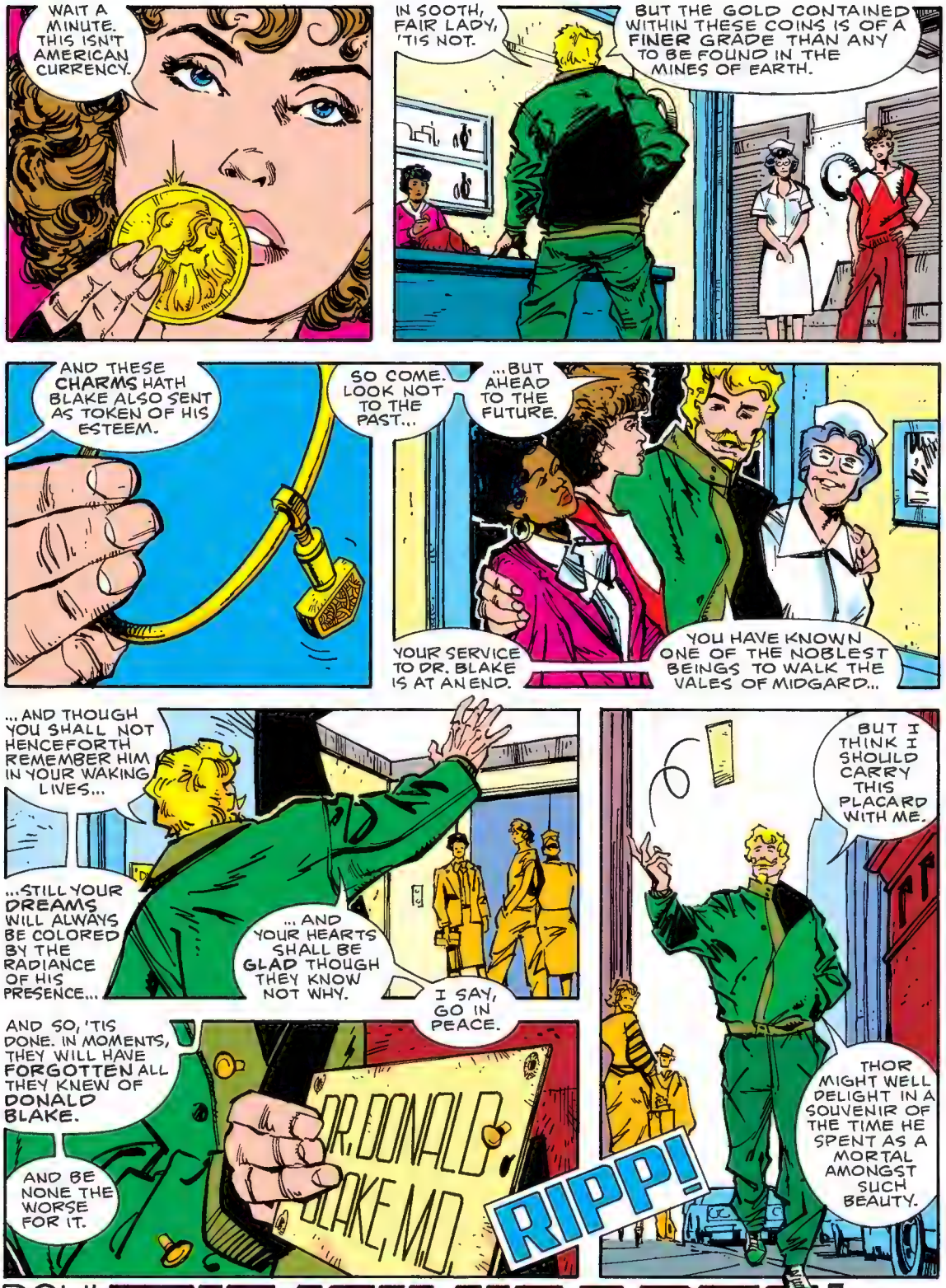

"THOUGH THE DISTANCE IS GREAT, STILL THE GLANCE OF HELA IS ENOUGH TO AGE THE VERY ROCKS AND BONES OF THE MOUNTAINS UNTIL THEY CRUMBLE TO DUST BENEATH THE SNOW AND BEGIN..."
KKKAKKKKLHK!
AN AVALANCHE!
ON, BIG FELLOW! GALLOP AS THE WIND!
I SHALL NOT ABANDON YOU TO THE MOUNTAIN'S DEADLY GRIP.
WITH MY HAMMER I SHALL WARD OFF THE THUNDERING PURSUIT UNTIL WE HAVE OUTRACED THE DOOM THAT SEEKS TO SLAY US BOTH!
NO, ODINSON!
THOUGH I CANNOT SLAY YOU DIRECTLY AT THIS REMOVE, YOUR STEED IS QUITE ANOTHER MATTER!
THE TOUCH OF HELA IS LONG ENOUGH FOR THAT!


MY HORSE FALTERS SUDDENLY AS THOUGH ILL.
ON, MY BOLD ONE! ONLY A LITTLE FARTHER AND WE SHALL--
WHAT SORCERY IS THIS!
MY HORSE TURNS TO DUST BEFORE MY EYES!
UGH!
THE AVALANCHE!
'TIS UPON ME!
BARRROOOOUUWWWW!!!
AND ONCE AGAIN, ALL IS SILENT IN THE MOUNTAINS OF ASGARD...
...AS SILENT AS THE GRAVE.

tales of Midgard home of the amazing human race


CHICAGO-- SANDBURG'S CITY OF THE BIG SHOULDERS.
CHICAGO-- WHERE HUNDREDS OF PROFESSIONAL OFFICES ARE STRUNG ALONG MICHIGAN AVENUE'S "MAGNIFICENT MILE"...
OFFICES BELONGING TO MEN OF HIGH STANDING AND HIGHER INCOMES...
...ALTHOUGH IN ONE PARTICULAR OFFICE, THE INCOME IS ALL BUT GONE AND THE STANDING CERTAINLY IN DOUBT...
IT'S BEEN MONTHS SINCE WE HEARD FROM HIM, SHAWNA.
DR. DONA BLAKE, M
HIS ACCOUNT IS NEARLY EXHAUSTED AND SOME BILLS ARE ALREADY OVERDUE.
I'VE REFERRED EVERY PATIENT HE EVER HAD TO OTHER PHYSICIANS.
HE CAN'T JUST HAVE VANISHED OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH, BRENDA.
THE PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR I HIRED TOLD ME SHIELD* MAY HAVE BEEN INVOLVED BUT IN THE END, HE RETURNED MY RETAINER AND QUIT LOOKING.
I THINK HE MAY HAVE BEEN BOUGHT OFF...
...AND I'M AFRAID SOMETHING TERRIBLE MAY HAVE HAPPENED TO DON.
*SUPREME HQ INTERNATIONAL ESPIONAGE LAW-ENFORCEMENT DIVISION!
NOK! NOK!

I BID YOU GREETINGS, DAMSELS.
'TIS A MORNING THAT SINGS OF THY BEAUTY AND GRACE TO ALL THE CITY. WHY, THE SUNLIGHT FAIR BATHES THE CLOUD-CAPPED TOWERS IN GOLD!
UH... I-- I'M AFRAID THAT DR. BLAKE ISN'T HERE AT THE MOMENT.
AND WELL I KNOW IT, MILADY.
YOU-- YOU DO?
YOU MUST BE MRS. BARCLAY, SURELY.
AND THESE SURPASSINGLY LOVELY LADIES CAN ONLY BE SHAWNA LYNDE AND NURSE STEVENS.
'TIS A GREAT PLEASURE AND HONOR FOR ME TO MEET THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN SO CLOSE TO DONALD BLAKE IN HIS DAY.
DO... DO YOU KNOW DON?
FEW KNOW HIM BETTER, MILADY.
AND 'TIS ON HIS BUSINESS THAT I HAVE COME TO SEE THEE.
WHERE IS HE? OH, WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO HIM!
FEAR NOT, SHAWNA.
HIS GOVERNMENT HATH NEED OF HIM AND HE HATH ANSWERED ITS CALL.
I KNEW SHIELD WAS INVOLVED!
BUT THE WORK HE HATH UNDERTAKEN IS LENGTHY AND DANGEROUS.
HE MAY NEVER RETURN.
STILL HE HATH NOT FORGOTTEN THEE AND I HAVE BEEN INSTRUCTED TO GREET THEE IN HIS NAME AND BRING YOU THIS.
HIS PHRASE, I BELIEVE, WAS "SEVERANCE PAY."


WAIT A MINUTE. THIS ISN'T AMERICAN CURRENCY.
IN SOOTH, FAIR LADY, 'TIS NOT.
BUT THE GOLD CONTAINED WITHIN THESE COINS IS OF A FINER GRADE THAN ANY TO BE FOUND IN THE MINES OF EARTH.
AND THESE CHARMS HATH BLAKE ALSO SENT AS TOKEN OF HIS ESTEEM.
SO COME. LOOK NOT TO THE PAST...
...BUT AHEAD TO THE FUTURE.
YOUR SERVICE TO DR. BLAKE IS AT AN END.
YOU HAVE KNOWN ONE OF THE NOBLEST BEINGS TO WALK THE VALES OF MIDGARD...
...AND THOUGH YOU SHALL NOT HENCEFORTH REMEMBER HIM IN YOUR WAKING LIVES...
...STILL YOUR DREAMS WILL ALWAYS BE COLORED BY THE RADIANCE OF HIS PRESENCE...
...AND YOUR HEARTS SHALL BE GLAD THOUGH THEY KNOW NOT WHY.
I SAY, GO IN PEACE.
AND SO, 'TIS DONE. IN MOMENTS, THEY WILL HAVE FORGOTTEN ALL THEY KNEW OF DONALD BLAKE.
AND BE NONE THE WORSE FOR IT.
DR. DONALD BLAKE, M.D.
RIPP!
BUT I THINK I SHOULD CARRY THIS PLACARD WITH ME.
THOR MIGHT WELL DELIGHT IN A SOUVENIR OF THE TIME HE SPENT AS A MORTAL AMONGST SUCH BEAUTY.

Next: **THE ICY HEARTS** IN WHICH WE MEET A GENTLEMAN FROM LONG AGO AND FAR AWAY.

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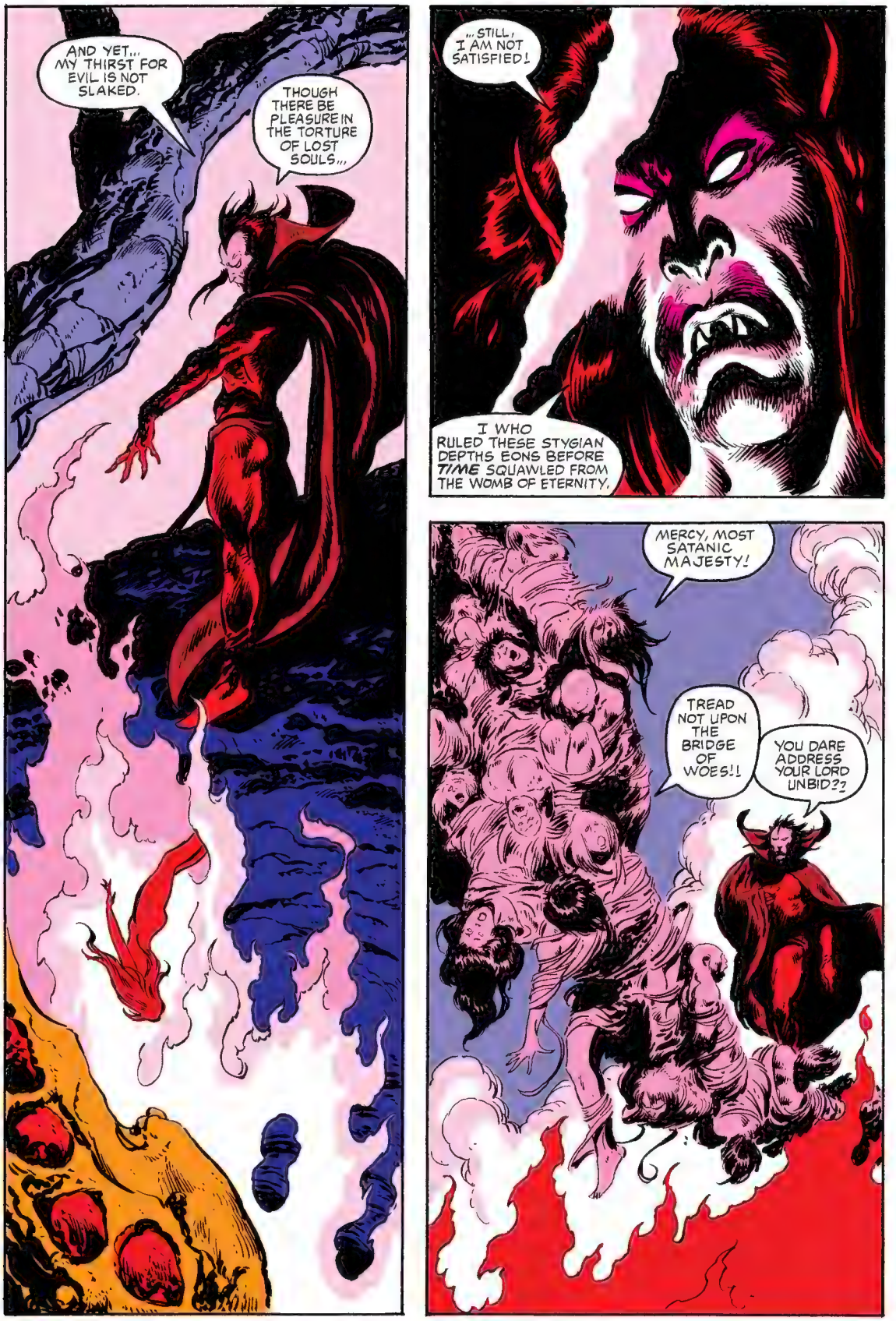
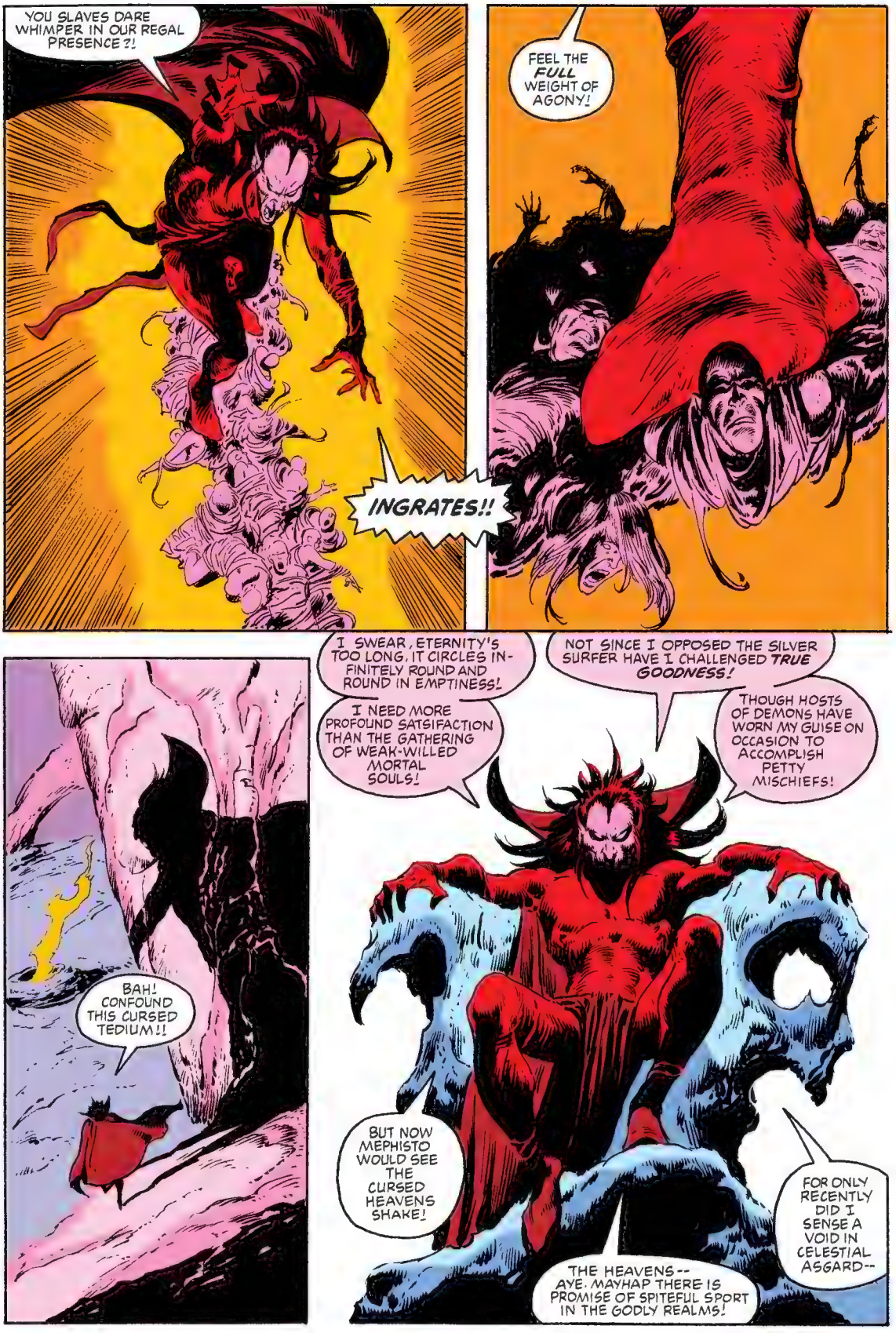
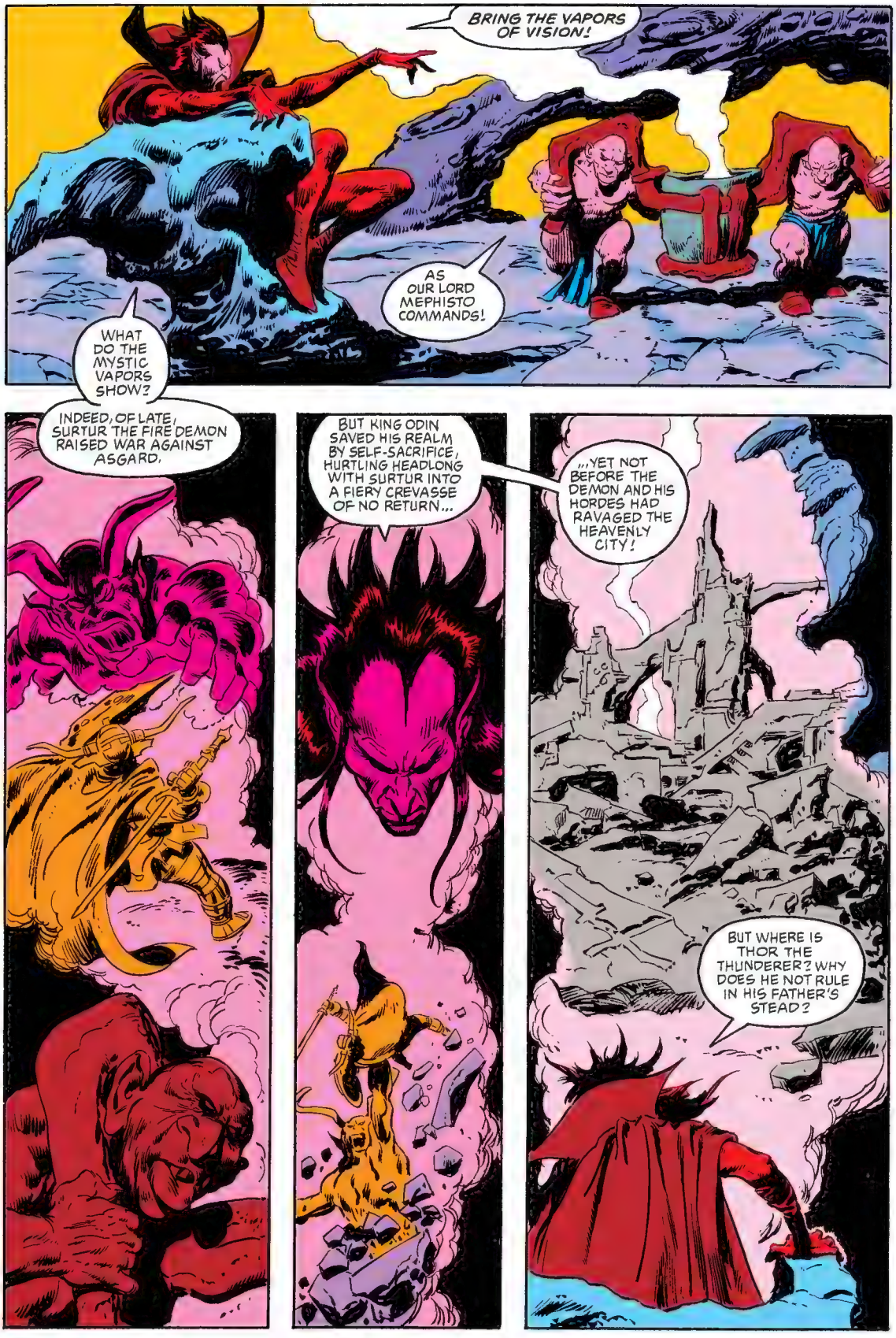
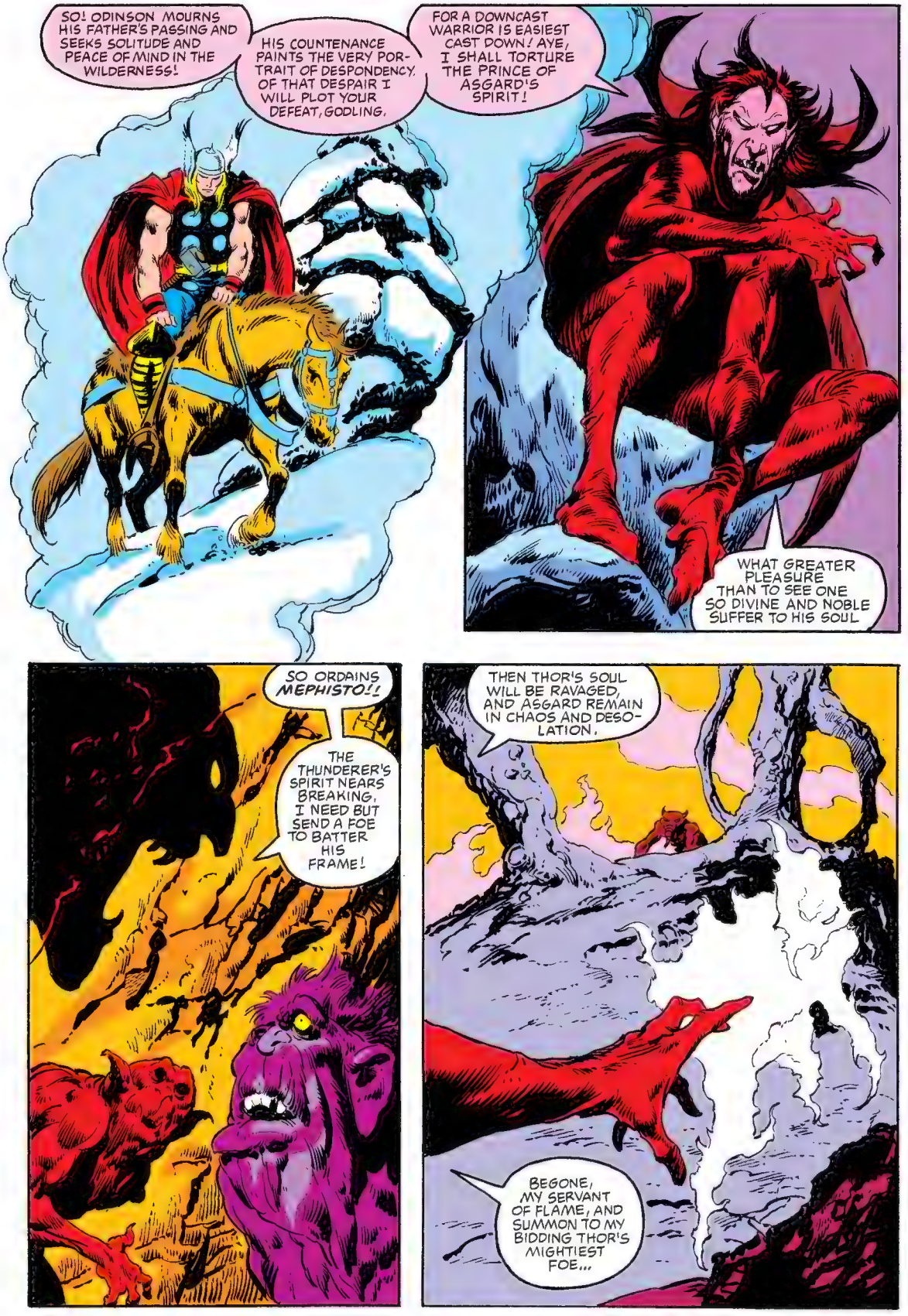
ANOTHER INFANT SOUL SNATCHED FROM THE CLASP OF UNSUSPECTING INNOCENCE!
AYE, SHEER SPITE IS THE SWEETEST NECTAR IN MEPHISTO'S REALM!
Stan Lee PRESENTS:
AND EVIL SHALL INHERIT

ALAN ZELENETZ · SCRIPTER
JOHN BUSCEMA · ARTIST
JOHN MORELLI · LETTERER
GEORGE ROUSSOS · COLORIST
RALPH MACCHIO · EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER · EDITOR IN CHIEF


AND YET... MY THIRST FOR EVIL IS NOT SLAKED.
THOUGH THERE BE PLEASURE IN THE TORTURE OF LOST SOULS...
...STILL, I AM NOT SATISFIED!
I WHO RULED THESE STYGIAN DEPTHS EONS BEFORE TIME SQUAWLED FROM THE WOMB OF ETERNITY.
MERCY, MOST SATANIC MAJESTY!
TREAD NOT UPON THE BRIDGE OF WOES!!
YOU DARE ADDRESS YOUR LORD UNBID??


YOU SLAVES DARE WHIMPER IN OUR REGAL PRESENCE?!
FEEL THE FULL WEIGHT OF AGONY!
INGRATES!!
I SWEAR, ETERNITY'S TOO LONG, IT CIRCLES INFINITELY ROUND AND ROUND IN EMPTINESS!
NOT SINCE I OPPOSED THE SILVER SURFER HAVE I CHALLENGED TRUE GOODNESS!
I NEED MORE PROFOUND SATSIFACTION THAN THE GATHERING OF WEAK-WILLED MORTAL SOULS!
THOUGH HOSTS OF DEMONS HAVE WORN MY GUISE ON OCCASION TO ACCOMPLISH PETTY MISCHIEFS!
BAH! CONFOUND THIS CURSED TEDIUM!!
BUT NOW MEPHISTO WOULD SEE THE CURSED HEAVENS SHAKE!
FOR ONLY RECENTLY DID I SENSE A VOID IN CELESTIAL ASGARD--
THE HEAVENS-- AYE. MAYHAP THERE IS PROMISE OF SPITEFUL SPORT IN THE GODLY REALMS!


BRING THE VAPORS OF VISION!
AS OUR LORD MEPHISTO COMMANDS!
WHAT DO THE MYSTIC VAPORS SHOW?
INDEED, OF LATE, SURTUR THE FIRE DEMON RAISED WAR AGAINST ASGARD.
BUT KING ODIN SAVED HIS REALM BY SELF-SACRIFICE, HURTLING HEADLONG WITH SURTUR INTO A FIERY CREVASSE OF NO RETURN...
...YET NOT BEFORE THE DEMON AND HIS HORDES HAD RAVAGED THE HEAVENLY CITY!
BUT WHERE IS THOR THE THUNDERER? WHY DOES HE NOT RULE IN HIS FATHER'S STEAD?


SO! ODINSON MOURNS HIS FATHER'S PASSING AND SEEKS SOLITUDE AND PEACE OF MIND IN THE WILDERNESS!
HIS COUNTENANCE PAINTS THE VERY PORTRAIT OF DESPONDENCY. OF THAT DESPAIR I WILL PLOT YOUR DEFEAT, GODLING.
FOR A DOWNCAST WARRIOR IS EASIEST CAST DOWN! AYE, I SHALL TORTURE THE PRINCE OF ASGARD'S SPIRIT!
WHAT GREATER PLEASURE THAN TO SEE ONE SO DIVINE AND NOBLE SUFFER TO HIS SOUL
SO ORDAINS MEPHISTO!!
THE THUNDERER'S SPIRIT NEARS BREAKING, I NEED BUT SEND A FOE TO BATTER HIS FRAME!
THEN THOR'S SOUL WILL BE RAVAGED, AND ASGARD REMAIN IN CHAOS AND DESOLATION.
BEGONE, MY SERVANT OF FLAME, AND SUMMON TO MY BIDDING THOR'S MIGHTIEST FOE...

"... ULIK THE INVINCIBLE, MASTER OF THE ROCK TROLLS UNDERGROUND!"

FASTER, SLUGGARDS! HAMMER! POUND!

BURN THE FORGES! BEND YOUR BACKS!!

I DEMAND A THOUSAND WEAPONS MORE FOR MY DEADLY ARSENAL!

YOU THERE, IRONSMITH! DO YOU NOT HEAR MY MIGHTY BROTHER ULIK!
TO THE TASK!
HOLD YOUR CURSED PROD, HORTH!

WE ARE ARMORERS, NOT SLAVES!
OH! ULIK! I AM STRUCK!

WHO DARES ASSAULT MY FLESH AND BLOOD-- MY BROTHER?!

BTOOM

SINCE THE DAY WINE-SODDEN GIANTS SLEW OUR SIRE AND DAM, HORTH HAS BEEN MY CHARGE!
WOE THE TROLL WHO DARES OFFEND HIM!

NOW BACK TO YOUR LABORS, YOU GAPING HALF-WITS!!

ULIK!!
WHO INTRUDES BELOW--?
HIS MAJESTY MEPHISTO, DARK LORD OF ALL THAT IS EVIL COMMANDS THAT YOU HASTEN SURFACEWARD AT ONCE! YOUR TASK--
MY TASK? NEVER!
NO ONE COMMANDS ULIK, THE MOST POWERFUL OF ALL TROLLS!
I SCOFF AT YOUR LORD'S ERRANDS--
--AND SEIZE HIS HERALD IN THE GRIP OF MY FIRE IRONS!

GO HEAT MY FURNACES, DEVIL!!
HA HA HA HA
HA, BROTHER! HOW THE DEMON SQUIRMED--
BUH-
ROOM

IMPUDENT FOOL! NONE MAY DEFY MEPHISTO!!

GRAAAR! I AM ENRAGED!!
BY HEL'S DRAGON! I'LL NOT DO YOUR BIDDING EVER!!
MY LASH-- DISSOLVED!
UTTER ONE MORE WORD, TROLL, AND I SHALL TURN YOU INTO MOUTHLESS STONE FOR-EVER!
WHAT-- WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!
LET ME FREE!!
TURN ME TO STONE! I'LL NOT BE YOUR SLAVE!

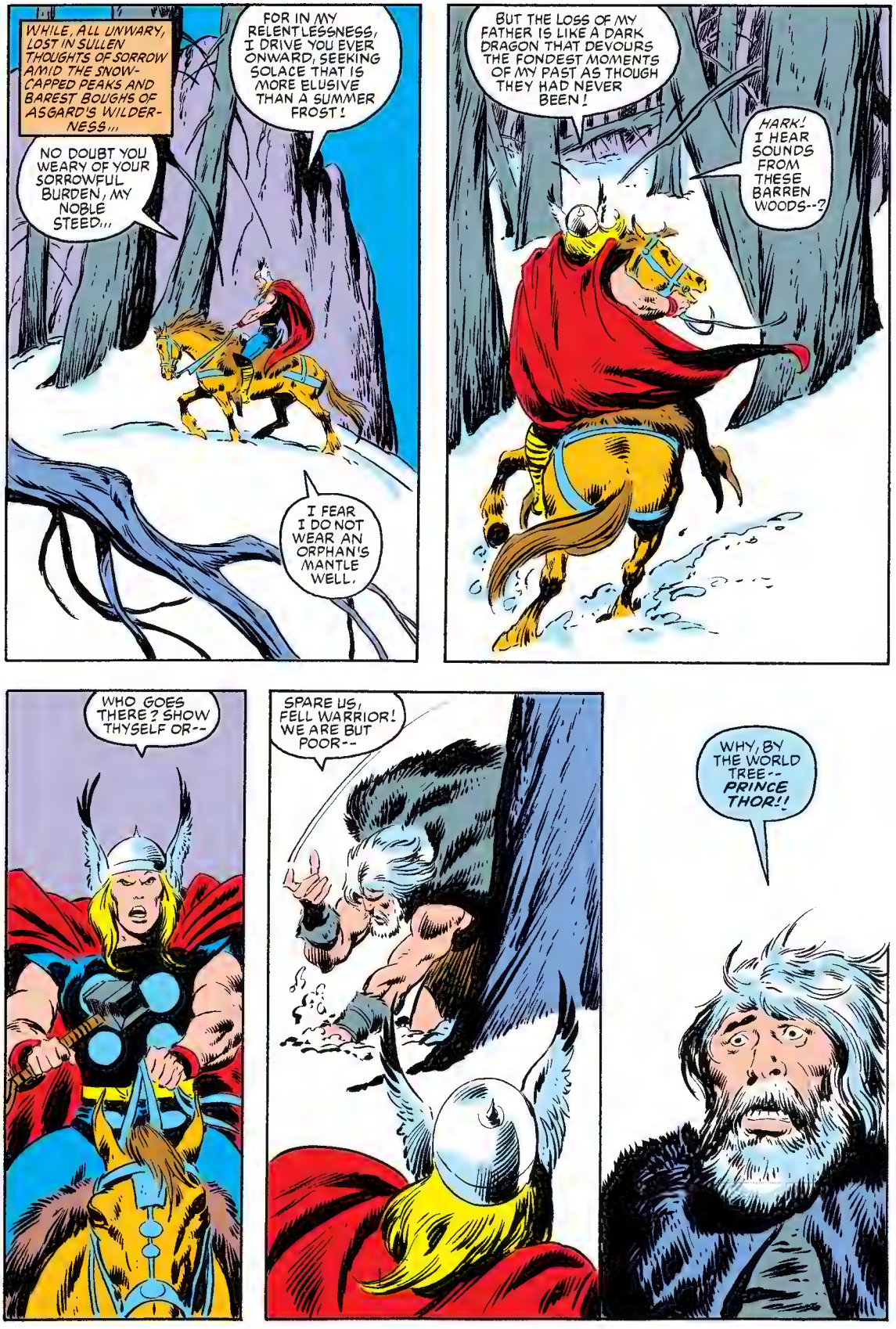
BOLD BRAGGART! I'LL BEND YOUR WILL!
THRASH HIS GODLY FORM AND TROUNCE THE THUNDERER UNTIL HIS VERY SOUL CRIES OUT "ENOUGH, MEPHISTO, I AM YOURS!"

FOR YOUR ARROGANCE! YOUR BROTHER COMES WITH ME...

...TO ASSURE THE DEED I COMMAND BE DONE!
ABOVE THESE CAVERNS IN ASGARD'S WILDERNESS, THOR, PRINCE OF ASGARD RIDES ALONE!

NOW, ULIK, UNLESS YOU VANQUISH THOR--
HORTH-- NO!!

CURSE YOU, MEPHISTO!! I'LL NOT LET MY BROTHER DIE!!
GRAARR!! BRING ME MY ARMORED CRAFT AND METAL POUNDERS!!
ULIK'S ULTRA-DRILL SHATTERS EARTH BEFORE IT AND GRINDS THE THICKEST ROCK TO NOTHINGNESS!
I HIE ME TO THE SURFACE WORLD OF HATED DAYLIGHT!
THAT HORTH MAY LIVE-- THE THUNDER GOD MUST DIE!!
NEVER HAVE I SEEN SUCH NAKED RAGE!
ULIK CANNOT BE STOPPED! THOR IS DOOMED!!
HIS BLAZING WRATH BIDS FAIR TO SHAKE THE VERY SPHERES!


WHILE, ALL UNWARY, LOST IN SULLEN THOUGHTS OF SORROW AMID THE SNOW-CAPPED PEAKS AND BAREST BOUGHS OF ASGARD'S WILDERNESS...
FOR IN MY RELENTLESSNESS, I DRIVE YOU EVER ONWARD, SEEKING SOLACE THAT IS MORE ELUSIVE THAN A SUMMER FROST!
NO DOUBT YOU WEARY OF YOUR SORROWFUL BURDEN, MY NOBLE STEED...
I FEAR I DO NOT WEAR AN ORPHAN'S MANTLE WELL.
BUT THE LOSS OF MY FATHER IS LIKE A DARK DRAGON THAT DEVOURS THE FONDEST MOMENTS OF MY PAST AS THOUGH THEY HAD NEVER BEEN!
HARK! I HEAR SOUNDS FROM THESE BARREN WOODS--?
WHO GOES THERE? SHOW THYSELF OR--
SPARE US, FELL WARRIOR! WE ARE BUT POOR--
WHY, BY THE WORLD TREE-- PRINCE THOR!!

AND YOU AN HONEST FELLOW OF ASGARD BY YOUR DRESS AND MIEN.
AYE, MY LORD.
ASTRID, CHILDREN, COME SEE WHO GREETS US IN THIS FORSAKEN SPOT.
GOOD MY LORD, WE ARE REFUGEES OF THE LATE MAYHEM 'TWIXT ODIN AND SURTUR THAT SHOOK THE KINGDOM'S CAPITAL AND RAVAGED OUR HOME!
WE SEEK THE SAFE SHELTER OF KINDRED, BLOOD-COUSINS BEYOND THESE HILLS!
GRACE US WITH YOUR PRESENCE TO OUR JOURNEY'S END, MY LIEGE. BREAK LOAF WITH US AND SHARE OUR MEAD.
MUCH THANKS, MY FRIENDS, BUT I MUST DECLINE. I TOO SEEK REFUGE FROM ASGARD'S RUINS.
BUT SOLITUDE IS THE BEST COMPANION FOR MY PRESENT GRIEF.
ODIN PR--
NAY, NO LONGER...
THE NORNS OF FATE PROTECT THEE FRIENDS.
AND GIVE BALM TO YOUR SORROW, NOBLE PRINCE.

WOULD THERE WERE BALM TO SOOTHE AN ACHING SOUL AS POULTICE BATHES THE BODY'S INJURIES!
BRAKK-K!
YMIR'S BLOOD!

PREPARE TO DIE, THUNDER GOD! I AM COME TO KILL YOU!!
ULIK!!
MY METAL POUNDERS SHATTER WHOLE MOUNTAINS!
THEY WILL CRUSH THE LIFE FROM YOU, ASGARDIAN!
MANY A TIME PAST YOU HAVE WAGED WAR AGAINST ME AND BELOVED ASGARD, TROLL, ONLY TO SUFFER GRIM DEFEAT!
YOU WOULD SUFFER SO AGAIN WERE I OF MIND TO ANSWER YOUR BOASTS!
BUT I MOURN MY FATHER'S LOSS AND HAVE NO HEART FOR BATTLE!
STAND ASIDE AND LET ME PASS!
SPOKEN LIKE A TRUE COWARD, STRIPLING OF ASGARD!!
BUT WHAT THEN ARE GODS BUT EMPTY WORDS AND SOFT BELLIES??
I STAND FIRM TO BAR YOUR WAY!!
NAY, VILLAIN! IF I MUST-- HAVE AT THEE!!
TO THE DEATH!!

ALL GOES AS MEPHISTO WILLS.
THE MINDLESS ULIK IS A LIVING BLUDGEON, AND ASGARD'S PRINCE FIGHTS JOYLESSLY-- HE MUST SUCCUMB!
TO SEE A GOD DESPAIR!
THE VERY THOUGHT FUFILLS MY MOST DEMONIC DESIRES!
ARGH!!
HIS STRENGTH IS OF A THOUSAND TROLLS!
HAR! YOU ARE MORE EASILY DESTROYED THAN EVEN I THOUGHT GODLING!!

DESTROYED?! NAY, I MERELY ADD YOUR WEIGHT TO MY OWN! THUS!!
DO YOU THINK I FEEL PAIN??
GRAAR!! YOU BUT AROUSE MY RAGE!!
AND KNOW THIS-- A TROLL'S FURY IS HIS GREATEST STRENGTH!
CRUNK
AND ULIK IS THE GREATEST OF TROLLS!
THOOM!

HE UPROOTS TREES LIKE FRAGILE DAFFODILS!
STILL, MY HAMMER, MJOLNIR WILL REDUCE HIS HURTLING PROJECTILE TO KINDLING WOOD!
CRY NO MERCY, THUNDER GOD! YOUR END DRAWS NIGH!
MJOLNIR-- NO!!
AAARRHH!!
UNPH! HIS POUNDERS BATTER MY BONES TO DUST...
...I FEAR HE WILL... DELIVER A FATAL... BLOW...
...UNLESS--

NOW I MUST TRY TO END THIS MADNESS FOR MY SPIRIT IS NOT IN THE FIGHT!
THRAM
YET, UNLESS I MUSTER STRENGTH, HE WILL SURELY DEFEAT ME FOR THE FIRST TIME!
THAKK
SHBUMF
NOW WHO SHALL CRY MERCY, ULIK?? LET US CEASE THIS SENSLESS PUMMELING--
THIS BATTLE ENDS ONLY WHEN YOUR LIFELESS FORM LIES IN THE RUBBLE OF QUAKE AND AVALANCHE!
SEE HOW MY POUNDERS RATTLE ASGARD TO THE CORE!!

BY THE HEART OF WYRD!

I MUST WHEEL MJOLNIR WITH MORE FURY THAN I HAVE EVER DONE...
...AND PRAY ITS WHIRLWIND FLING THE SNOWSLIDE INTO SPACE...
BUT HAVE I STRENGTH LEFT TO DO THE DEED?

MY MUSCLES ACHE--I CAN GO ON NO LONGER...
ENOUGH, ULIK, I WEARY OF YOUR GAME!
YOU COWER, FOR YOU ARE CLOSE TO DEATH, LIKE YOUR CURSED FATHER, ODIN, HELA TAKE HIS SOUL!!
BEFOUL NOT MY SIRE'S MEMORY WITH YOUR RANK BREATH, HATEFUL TROLL!!
YOUR CURSED INSULTS GIVE RENEWED LIFE TO MY FLAGGING LIMBS!
THWAM!
NEVER UTTER ODIN'S NAME--
THAK
--WITH AUGHT BUT HUMBLE HEART--
UMPH!
PKOW!
--AND REVERENCE!!

COME! TO YOUR FEET, TROLL! I HAVE FURY YET TO FEED--
--AND WOULD TOPPLE YOU AGAIN WITH THESE NAKED FISTS!!
NAY, THUNDERER, I... AM ASHAMED IN MY DEFEAT. YOU HAVE DOOMED HORTH TO DIE!
HORTH?
MEPHISTO URGED THIS BATTLE ON ME TO BATTER YOUR SOUL,
HE STOLE MY BROTHER HORTH AND VOWED HE WOULD DIE IF YOU WERE NOT BROKEN IN SPIRIT. BUT TO BATTLE MERELY AS THE PAWN OF ANOTHER IS NOT THE WAY OF ULIK!
THEN CURSED MEPHISTO HAS FAILED. THOR'S SOUL IS NO DEVIL'S BOOTY!
NOW I AM GONE TO BROOD UPON MY FATHER'S DEATH IN SOLITUDE.
GO, THUNDER GOD. I'LL NOT BEG YOU TO SAVE MY BROTHER'S LIFE. FOR WHAT IS HE TO YOU?
I AM NO SAVIOR OF TROLLS.

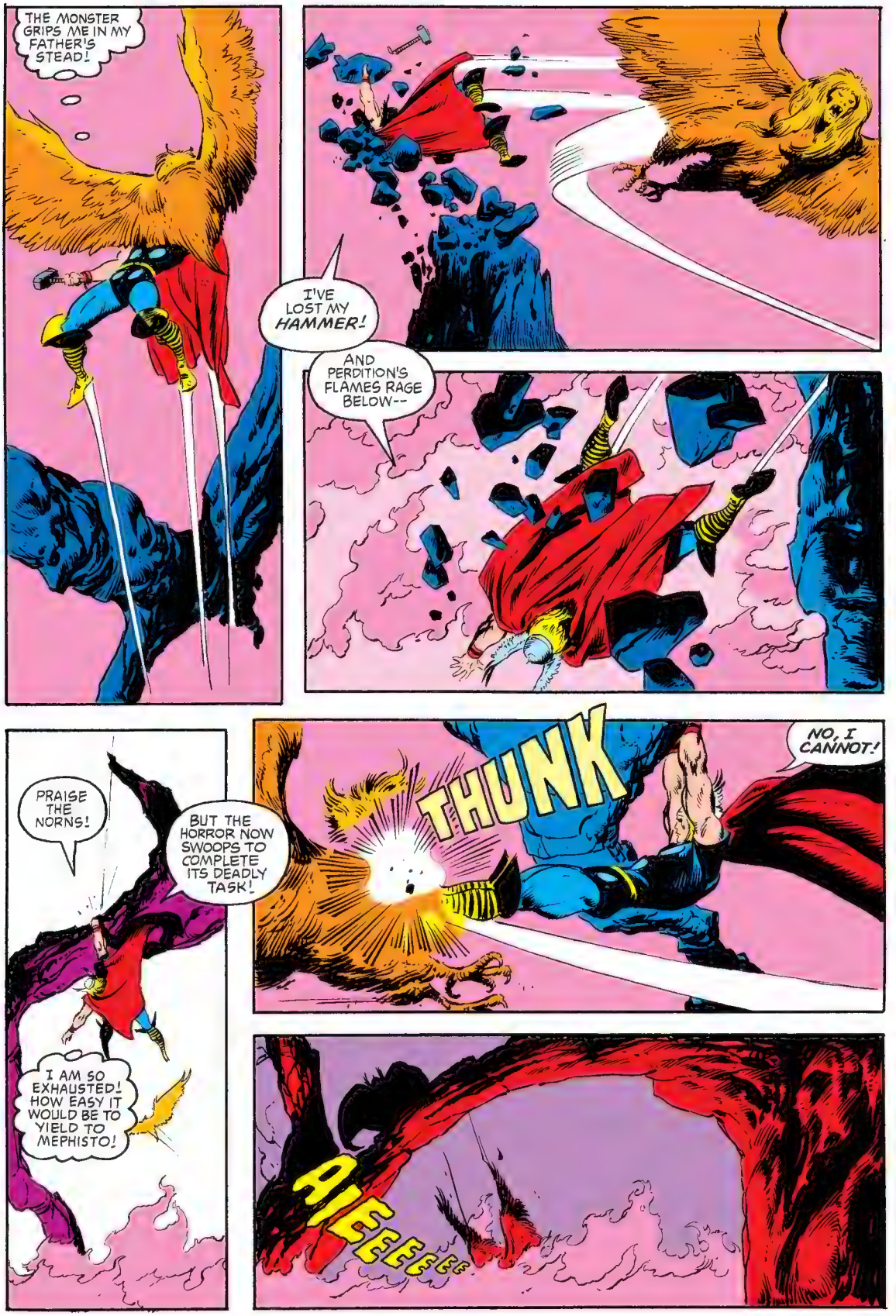
WHAT IS ULIK'S BROTHER TO ME?
AYE, I AM VEXED IN SPIRIT AND SEEK NO FURTHER COMBAT THIS DAY.
YET... CAN I TURN MY BACK ON ANY BEING WHO SEEKS DIVINE AID? IS THIS WHAT THE MIGHTY THOR HAS COME TO IN HIS TIME OF SORROW?
THE WAY OF ASGARD HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE WAY OF LIFE!
AND EVEN A TROLL'S LIFE IS PRECIOUS BEYOND UNDERSTANDING!
I WILL REDEEM YOUR BROTHER AND WARN MEPHISTO OF HIS ARROGANCE IN DARING TO BETRAY THE PRINCE OF ASGARD!
BEGONE, NOW. LEAVE HEAVEN'S REALM TO BE AT PEACE AND HOMEWARDS HIE TO YOUR CAVERNS!
SO BE IT.
HEAR ME, MEPHISTO!
I SHALL SCOUR THE UNIVERSE AND TRACK YOU TO YOUR STYGIAN SPHERE IF IT TAKE ALL ETER--

--NITY!?
AND WHEN YOU FIND ME, WHAT THEN, GODLING?

I KNOW NOT HOW YOU BROUGHT ME HERE, DEVIL, BUT I SEEK THE LIFE OF HORTH THE TROLL.
AND DO YOU THINK LIFE MEANS AUGHT TO ME??
THE TROLL WAS CAST INTO DEATH'S PIT BEFORE HIS BROTHER EVER CHALLENGED YOU!
I NEVER INTENDED TO FREE HIM, EVEN HAD YOU LOST TO ULIK...
...AS YOU MOST ASSUREDLY SHALL TO MEPHISTO!
BRAZEN DECEIVER! NAY!!
MY ENCHANTED MALLET SHALL HUMBLE YOU!!
DO YOU CALL THIS SLAG ENCHANTED, THUNDER GOD?

DO YOU PRETEND, OR ARE YOU TRULY IGNORANT OF THE FACT THAT MEPHISTO RISES ABOVE ENCHANTMENT?
YOUR HAMMER, LIKE ALL ELSE, IS INFINITELY VAIN IN THE FACE OF ETERNAL EVIL!
BUT YOU INSULT ME TO THINK I SHALL ENGAGE YOU IN A BATTLE OF BRUTE FORCE!
BAH! I LEAVE SUCH DOINGS TO MINDLESS FOOLS LIKE ULIK!
MY INTENT IS TO DRAIN YOUR WILLFUL SPIRIT 'TIL NAUGHT BE LEFT BUT A NAKED QUIVERING AND DESPAIRING SOUL--
--WHICH I SHALL CLASP TO MY BOSOM AS THE GREATEST PRIZE OF ALL!
KNOW, MEPHISTO, YOU SHALL NEVER BREAK MY WILL, FOR I FIGHT UNTIL THE LAST BREATH!
WE SHALL SEE, THUS!
HARKEN YE TO LORD MEPHISTO, MY SON, AND JOIN ME IN HIS ETERNAL REALM!
I BEG YOU HEED YOUR FATHER'S SPIRIT.
NO! IT CANNOT BE!
MY FATHER FELL IN NOBLE BATTLE AND MERITS VALHALLA HALL AS FINAL REWARD!
HIS SOUL COULD NOT BE HERE!

ARE YOU SO CERTAIN THIS IS NOT YOUR FATHER'S SHADE--
--THAT YOU WOULD LET A CONJURED HARPY REND HIM LIMB FROM LIMB?
FIENDISH VULTURE! I HAVE SEEN MY FATHER DIE ALREADY ONCE!
I'LL NOT--!


THE MONSTER GRIPS ME IN MY FATHER'S STEAD!
I'VE LOST MY HAMMER!
AND PERDITION'S FLAMES RAGE BELOW--
PRAISE THE NORNS!
BUT THE HORROR NOW SWOOPS TO COMPLETE ITS DEADLY TASK!
I AM SO EXHAUSTED! HOW EASY IT WOULD BE TO YIELD TO MEPHISTO!
THUNK
NO, I CANNOT!
AIEEEEE

TO ME MJOLNIR!
NOW, IF MY FATHER'S SOUL THIS TRULY BE--
YOUR FATHER'S SOUL! HA! NAUGHT BUT AN ILLUSION OF SMOKE!
I SENSE DESPAIR TIGHTENING ABOUT YOUR HEART TO SEE YOUR FATHER'S VISION FADE!
BUT MEPHISTO HAS YET MORE TO SHOW YOU.
FETCH THE EBONY CRYSTAL, SLAVE.
NO SOONER BID THAN DONE MASTER!
FOR CERTAIN YOU RECALL THE BLOOMING ROSE THE GODDESS SIF GAVE YOU AS TOKEN OF HER LOVE, ASGARDIAN?

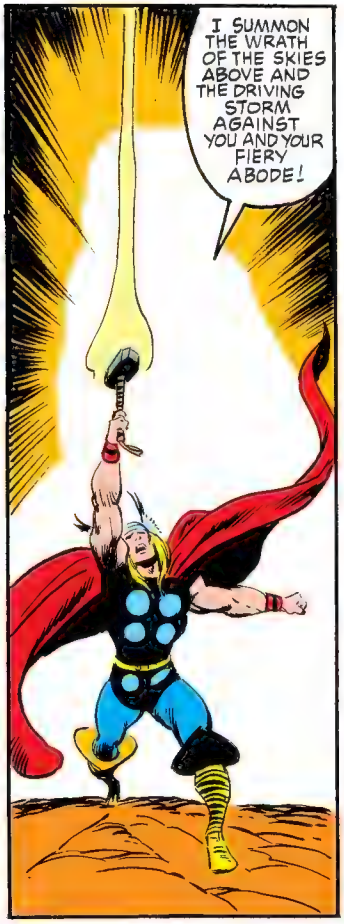
YES, HOW FONDLY YOU COMPARED THE FLOWER'S HUE TO THE BLUSH UPON HER CHEEK THAT SUMMER MORN!
SEE WHERE THAT ROSE RESTS NOW, BLACK AND BLIGHTED IN MY REALM--
--SYMBOL OF THE DEATH OF LOVE!
IT'S SPINY TENDRILS PIERCE MY FLESH LIKE SPEARS OF TROLL-IRON--

AND ITS GRIP IS TEN TIMES THAT OF ULIK'S!
CRUSHING THE BREATH OF LIFE FROM MY LUNGS!
NO!
LIFE'S FORCE--
--MUST ASSERT ITSELF!

I AM FREE, MEPHISTO!
FOR LIFE RENEWS ITSELF, THOUGH HEARTFELT LOSS AND DASHED HOPES EVER SEEK TO CRUSH IT!
IS THAT YOUR PREACHING, GODLING?
YET FOR EACH SINGLE MOMENT OF LIFE, THERE ARE MANY EVILS!
TO BATTLE THEM ALL IS TO EMPTY THE OCEANS WITH A SIEVE... A VAIN ILLUSION!
BEHOLD IN THE VAPORS OF VISION THE SCENE JUST PAST AS YOU DID BATTLE WITH ULIK.
THOUGH YOU DEFEATED ULIK, STILL HIS DEADLY AVALANCHE STRUCK THE FAMILY OF ASGARDIANS WHO PASSED THAT WAY!
THEY DIED ALL BENEATH ULIK'S CRASHING SNOW AND STONE!

SO THOUGH YOU DID INDEED VANQUISH ULIK...
...IN THE LARGER SCHEME YOUR LOYAL SUBJECTS MET A MOST PITIFUL END!
THIS IS BUT ONE MORE DECEIT TO CRACK MY HEART WITH DESPAIR.

LIAR!! THEY ARE NOT DEAD!
HA! YOU DO DISCOVER MY TRICKS TOO EASILY, GODLING.
FIE ON YOU, WRETCH! ENOUGH!


I SUMMON THE WRATH OF THE SKIES ABOVE AND THE DRIVING STORM AGAINST YOU AND YOUR FIERY ABODE!

THOR'S HEART'S PASSION SHALL BE MANIFEST IN HEAVEN'S FLOODING TORRENTS!

HO! HOW LIKE A GOD! SUCH ARROGANCE!
YOU THINK TO EXTINGUISH EVIL'S FLAME THAT BURNED BRIGHT BEFORE YOUR PETTY REALM OF ASGARD WAS A SPECK IN THE EYE OF INFINITY.

WILL YOU STAND HERE, MALLET UPRAISED FOR ALL ETERNITY, THE VERY PORTRAIT OF FUTILITY?
HE SPEAKS THE TRUTH. RASHNESS AND FRUTRATION WILL NOT DEFEAT SUCH PRIMAL EVIL INCARNATE STILL--

MAYHAP I CANNOT STAY YOUR EVIL, MEPHISTO, BUT I SHALL NEVER YIELD MY WILL NOR CEASE TO FIGHT!
BAH! I HAVE HAD MY MOMENT'S PLEASURE!

AND YOU HAVE LEARNED THAT MEPHISTO'S EVIL IS NOT DONE FOR GOALS AND GAIN.
NAY, MINE IS THE TRUEST EVIL, DONE FOR NO END BUT ITSELF!!!
!!!ACTED WITHOUT THOUGHT OF CONSEQUENCE AND WITHOUT MEASURE!

SO LONG AS THERE IS LIGHT, THERE WILL BE SHADOW.
BEGONE! I DISMISS YOU! AND KNOW THAT MEPHISTO IS ALWAYS BEHIND YOU, UNDEFEATABLE, DOGGING YOUR EVERY STEP!!!

...UNTIL ONE DAY THE SHADOWS WILL INHERIT THE UNIVERSE.
THE VAPORS OF VISION!
FOR I WOULD SEE THE THUNDERER'S FACE--
--WHEN HE DISCOVERS THE WANDERERS OF ASGARD TRULY DEAD BENEATH THE AVALANCHE!
INDEED, THE DEVIL SPOKE TRUE!
NOW I KNOW MY FATHER'S MEMORY SHALL NOT BE SERVED BY MEDITATION BUT BY STEADFAST PURPOSE AND DEED. THESE DEATHS HAVE ONLY STRENGTHENED MY RESOLVE!
UPON THIS VERY SPOT I'LL RAISE A STONE MEMORIAL TO THESE INNOCENTS WHOSE DEATHS SHALL NOT BE IN VAIN! EVEN THE BROTHER OF ULIK SHALL NOT BE FORGOTTEN!
KNOW, MEPHISTO, I SHALL ONLY DOUBLE MY VIGILANCE AGAINST YOU!!
YOU'VE WON NO VICTORY THIS DAY!
HA
HA
HA

ERECT YOUR HOLLOW MONUMENTS, THUNDER GOD, UNLIKE MY EVIL, IN TIME THEY WILL CRUMBLE TO DUST.
MY CUP IS FULL,
AYE, SHEER SPITE IS THE SWEETEST NECTAR IN MEPHISTO'S REALM!
FIN

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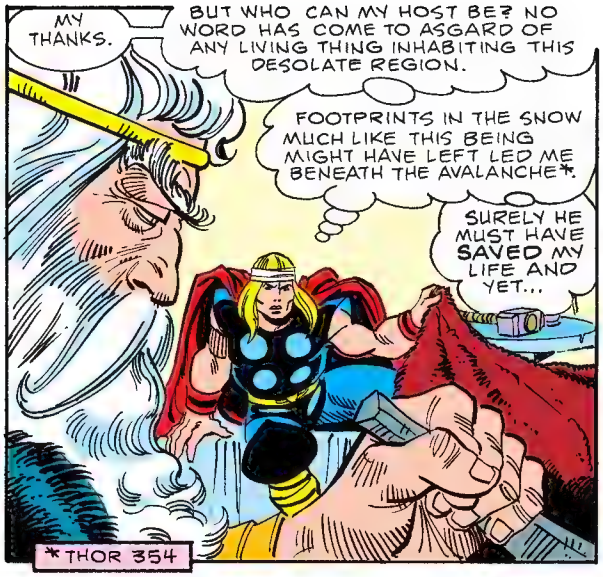
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
the mighty
THOR
11-26-84

Stan Lee PRESENTS:
THE ICY HEARTS (or My Dinners with Thor!)
IN THE NORTHERN REACHES OF ASGARD, THE HOME OF THE MIGHTY NORSE GODS, THE WIND WHIPS ABOUT THE FROZEN LANDSCAPE SINGING WINTRY SONGS TO THE SCULPTED PEAKS.
'TIS SAID THAT NO LIVING BEING DWELLS WITHIN THAT ICY REALM, FOR THE DEADLY COLD WOULD SLAY BOTH GODS AND MORTALS ALIKE.
AND YET, NOT EVEN THE GLEEMEN OF OLD, STORYTELLERS TO KINGS AND EARLS, CAN SEE CLEARLY INTO THOSE DEBATABLE LANDS...
...AND MANY ARE THE STORIES THAT COULD BE TOLD OF THAT REALM OF ENDLESS WINTER IF ONLY THE TRUTH WERE KNOWN.
THIS IS SUCH A STORY.

'TIS A GOODLY MALLET, MJOLNIR.
THE DWARFS MADE WELL THIS MAGIC HAMMER.
A TRUE SERVANT AGAINST ALL THAT IS EVIL.
UHHH.
MY GUEST AWAKENS.
chunk
UHHH. THE AVALANCHE!
FATHER, I'M COMING! I'M COMING!
I--I--!
I RE-MEMBER!
I FELL BEFORE THE ROARING AVALANCHE AND SHOULD HAVE DIED!
BUT WHO ARE YOU?!!
AM I TRULY DEAD AND THIS SOME CORNER OF VALHALLA?

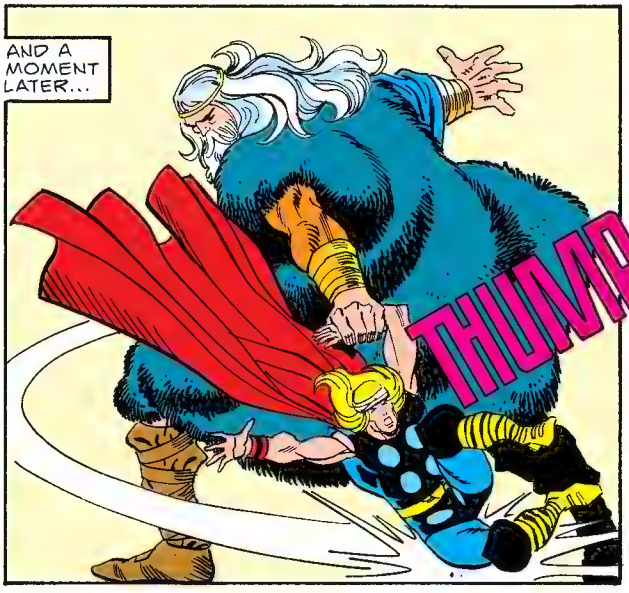
NAY, LITTLE ONE. THE GOLDEN HALLS OF VALHALLA BASK IN THE WARMTH OF THE GLOWING SUN FAR FROM HERE.
BUT FOR ALL THE LEAGUES BETWEEN US AND THAT GREAT DWELLING PLACE OF HEROES, YOU SHALL NOT FIND THE HOSPITALITY OF MY HOME LACKING.
I BID YOU WELCOME.


MY THANKS.
BUT WHO CAN MY HOST BE? NO WORD HAS COME TO ASGARD OF ANY LIVING THING INHABITING THIS DESOLATE REGION.
FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW MUCH LIKE THIS BEING MIGHT HAVE LEFT LED ME BENEATH THE AVALANCHE*.
SURELY HE MUST HAVE SAVED MY LIFE AND YET...
*THOR 354

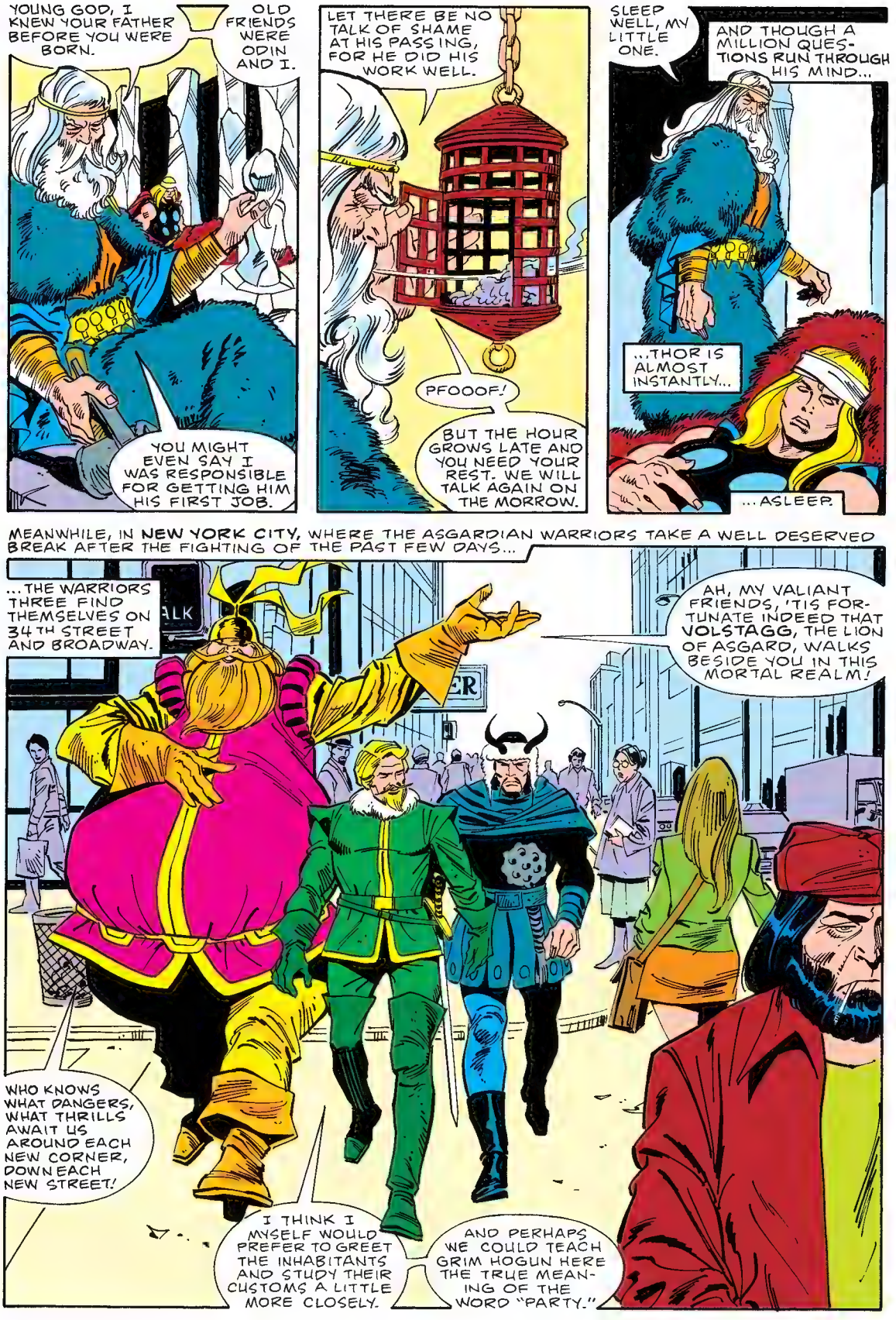
BE AT PEACE, LITTLE ONE. I DO NOT SEEK YOUR DEATH.
FOR IF I DID, I SHOULD HAVE LEFT YOU BENEATH THE SNOW.
YET HELA TO WHOM YOU SPOKE RASHLY* WOULD SEE YOU DEAD.
*LAST ISSUE, LATECOMERS.

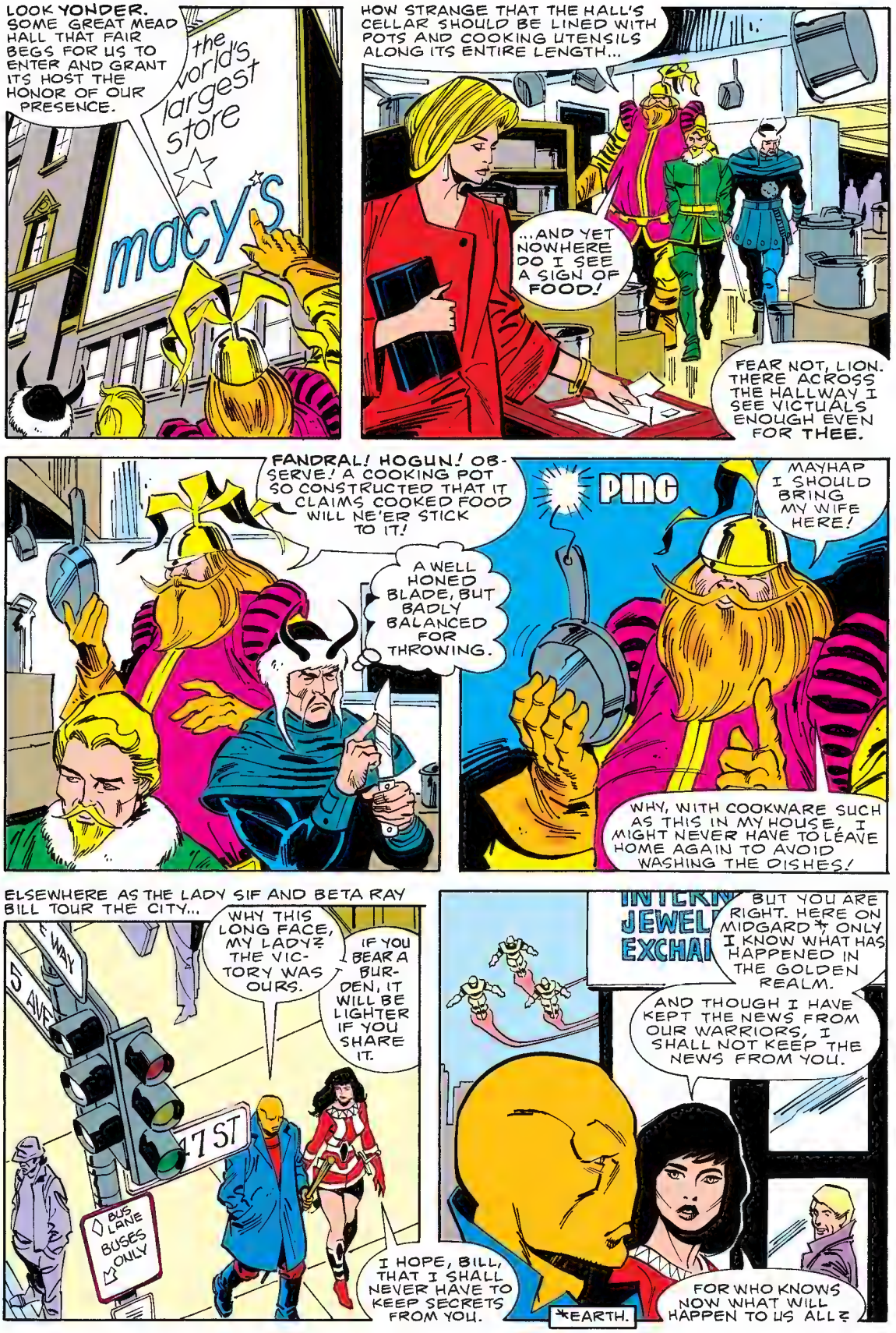
THE DEATH GODDESS CANNOT HIDE HER MOTIVES ANYMORE THAN THE SUN CAN HIDE ITS LIGHT.
BUT NOW, YOU YOUNG SIR, RISE UP. FOR IF YOU WOULD HAVE YOUR SUPPER TONIGHT, YOU MUST WRESTLE ME.
I FEEL AS THOUGH I CAN HARDLY STAND AND YET, MY HOST WOULD FIGHT BEFORE DINNER?

VERY WELL. THE GUEST MUST ACKNOWLEDGE HIS RESPONSIBILITIES TO HIS HOST.
YET LOOK AT THE SIZE OF HIM!!
COME, LITTLE ONE. BE NOT SHY! BUT BE WARNED. ONLY TWO BEFORE YOU HAVE EVER BESTED ME IN COMBAT!

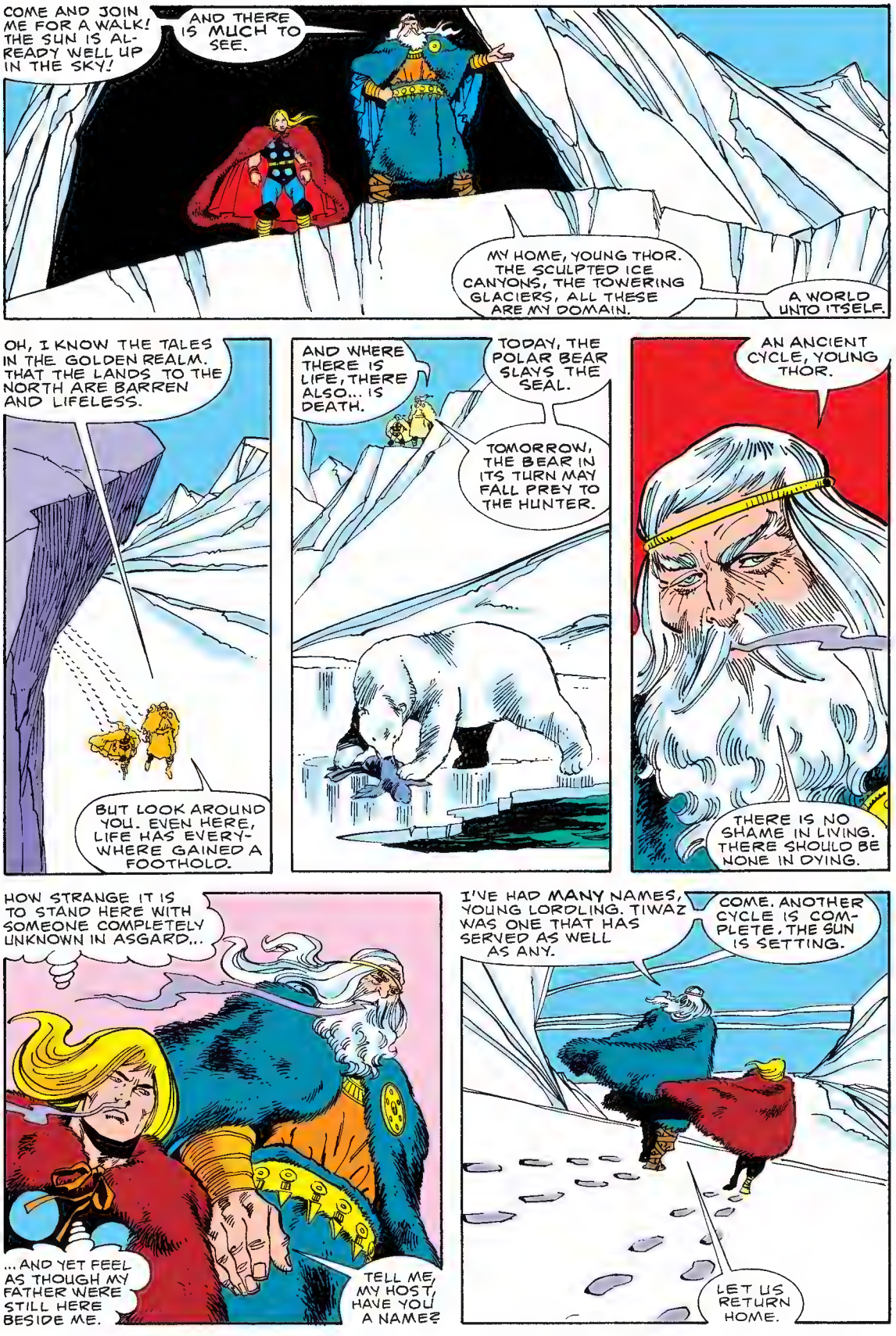

AND A MOMENT LATER...
THUMP

WE MUST BUILD YOUR STRENGTH UP AGAIN, MY YOUNG DRAKE!
YOUR HEART IS VALIANT BUT YOUR FLESH HAS BEEN WEAKENED BY THE ORDEAL OF THE PAST FEW DAYS.*
*DETAILS CAN BE FOUND ALL THROUGH THOR 350-354.
COME, MY FRIENDS. BRING OUR GUEST SUCH NOURISHING BROTH AND BREAD AS CAN BE FOUND IN OUR ABODE.
YOU WERE FORTUNATE, LITTLE ONE.
HAD YOU NOT BEEN FOUND BENEATH THE ICE AND SNOW, HELA WOULD EVEN NOW BE GREETING YOU WITH OPEN ARMS.
PERHAPS IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER SO.
THE NINE WORLDS HAVE BEEN MADE SAFE FROM SURTUR AND HIS DEMONS, BUT AT A TERRIBLE COST.
"MY FATHER, ODIN, FELL WITH HIM INTO THE FIERY CREVASSE AND DID NOT RETURN. WHAT SHALL WE DO WITHOUT HIM?"
IS THIS THE NOBLE SON OF ODIN, THOR THE THUNDERER, WHO SHARES MY BREAD AND WHINES AT MY TABLE?
YOUR FATHER WOULD NEVER HAVE BELIEVED IT OF YOU.
SURELY YOU CAN HONOR HIS MEMORY IN SOME MORE GRACEFUL FASHION.
WHAT DO YOU KNOW FOR MY FATHER AND HIS FASHION! HE WAS THE SON OF BOR, SON OF BURI AND A GREATER WARRIOR THESE WORLDS HAVE NEVER SEEN!
AND NOW HE IS GONE. EVERY LIVING THING SHOULD WEEP FOR SHAME.

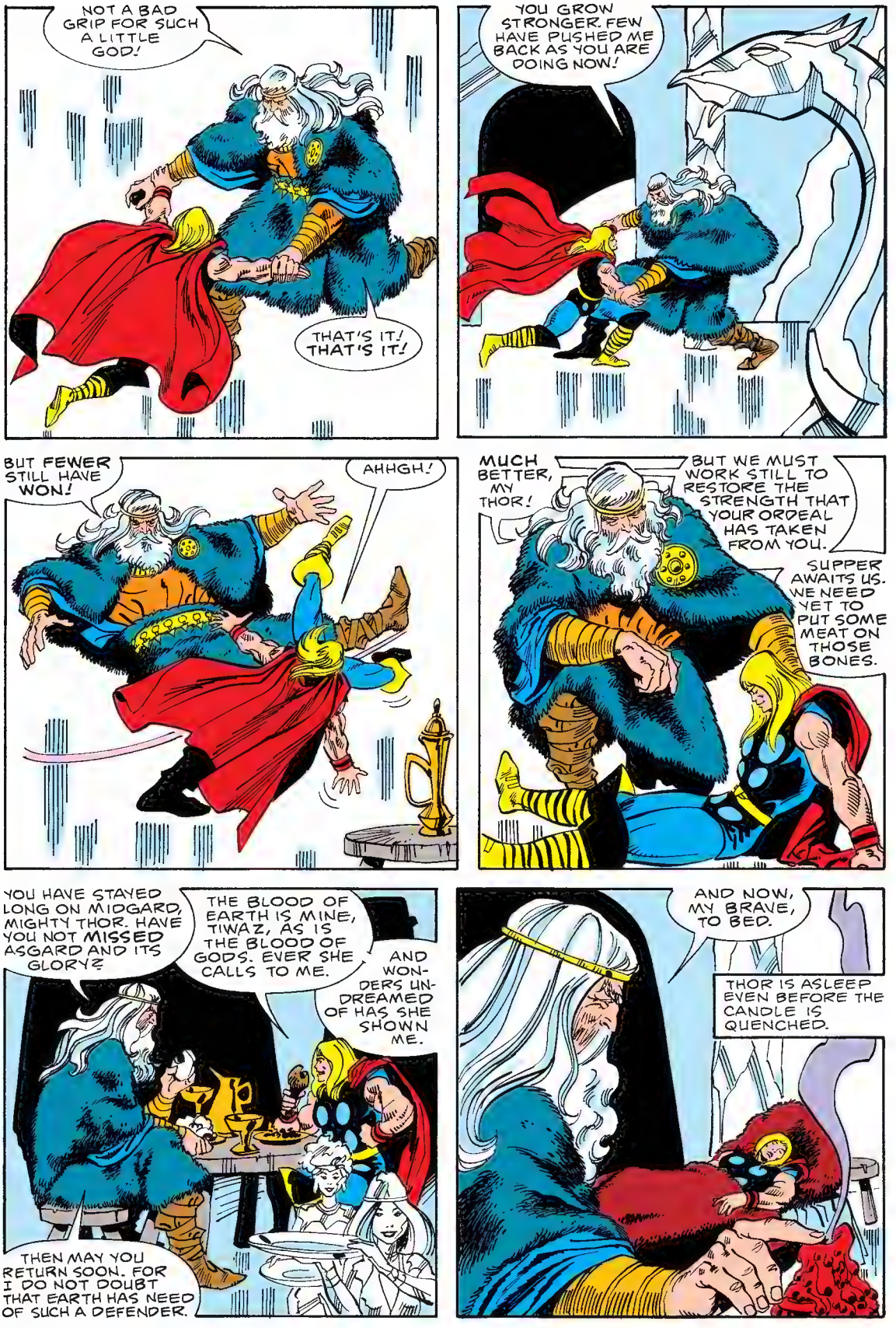

YOUNG GOD, I KNEW YOUR FATHER BEFORE YOU WERE BORN.
OLD FRIENDS WERE ODIN AND I.
YOU MIGHT EVEN SAY I WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR GETTING HIM HIS FIRST JOB.
LET THERE BE NO TALK OF SHAME AT HIS PASSING, FOR HE DID HIS WORK WELL.
PFOOOF!
BUT THE HOUR GROWS LATE AND YOU NEED YOUR REST. WE WILL TALK AGAIN ON THE MORROW.
SLEEP WELL, MY LITTLE ONE.
AND THOUGH A MILLION QUESTIONS RUN THROUGH HIS MIND...
...THOR IS ALMOST INSTANTLY...
...ASLEEP.
MEANWHILE, IN NEW YORK CITY, WHERE THE ASGARDIAN WARRIORS TAKE A WELL DESERVED BREAK AFTER THE FIGHTING OF THE PAST FEW DAYS...
...THE WARRIORS THREE FIND THEMSELVES ON 34TH STREET AND BROADWAY.
AH, MY VALIANT FRIENDS, 'TIS FORTUNATE INDEED THAT VOLSTAGG, THE LION OF ASGARD, WALKS BESIDE YOU IN THIS MORTAL REALM!
WHO KNOWS WHAT DANGERS, WHAT THRILLS AWAIT US AROUND EACH NEW CORNER, DOWN EACH NEW STREET!
I THINK I MYSELF WOULD PREFER TO GREET THE INHABITANTS AND STUDY THEIR CUSTOMS A LITTLE MORE CLOSELY.
AND PERHAPS WE COULD TEACH GRIM HOGUN HERE THE TRUE MEANING OF THE WORD "PARTY."


LOOK YONDER. SOME GREAT MEAD HALL THAT FAIR BEGS FOR US TO ENTER AND GRANT ITS HOST THE HONOR OF OUR PRESENCE.
the world's largest store
macy's
HOW STRANGE THAT THE HALL'S CELLAR SHOULD BE LINED WITH POTS AND COOKING UTENSILS ALONG ITS ENTIRE LENGTH...
...AND YET NOWHERE DO I SEE A SIGN OF FOOD!
FEAR NOT, LION. THERE ACROSS THE HALLWAY I SEE VICTUALS ENOUGH EVEN FOR THEE.
FANDRAL! HOGUN! OBSERVE! A COOKING POT SO CONSTRUCTED THAT IT CLAIMS COOKED FOOD WILL NE'ER STICK TO IT!
A WELL HONED BLADE, BUT BADLY BALANCED FOR THROWING.
PING
MAYHAP I SHOULD BRING MY WIFE HERE!
WHY, WITH COOKWARE SUCH AS THIS IN MY HOUSE, I MIGHT NEVER HAVE TO LEAVE HOME AGAIN TO AVOID WASHING THE DISHES!
ELSEWHERE AS THE LADY SIF AND BETA RAY BILL TOUR THE CITY...
WHY THIS LONG FACE, MY LADY? THE VICTORY WAS OURS.
IF YOU BEAR A BURDEN, IT WILL BE LIGHTER IF YOU SHARE IT.
5 AVE
47 ST
BUS LANE BUSES ONLY
I HOPE, BILL, THAT I SHALL NEVER HAVE TO KEEP SECRETS FROM YOU.
INTERN JEWEL EXCHA
BUT YOU ARE RIGHT. HERE ON MIDGARD* ONLY I KNOW WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE GOLDEN REALM.
AND THOUGH I HAVE KEPT THE NEWS FROM OUR WARRIORS, I SHALL NOT KEEP THE NEWS FROM YOU.
*EARTH.
FOR WHO KNOWS NOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO US ALL?

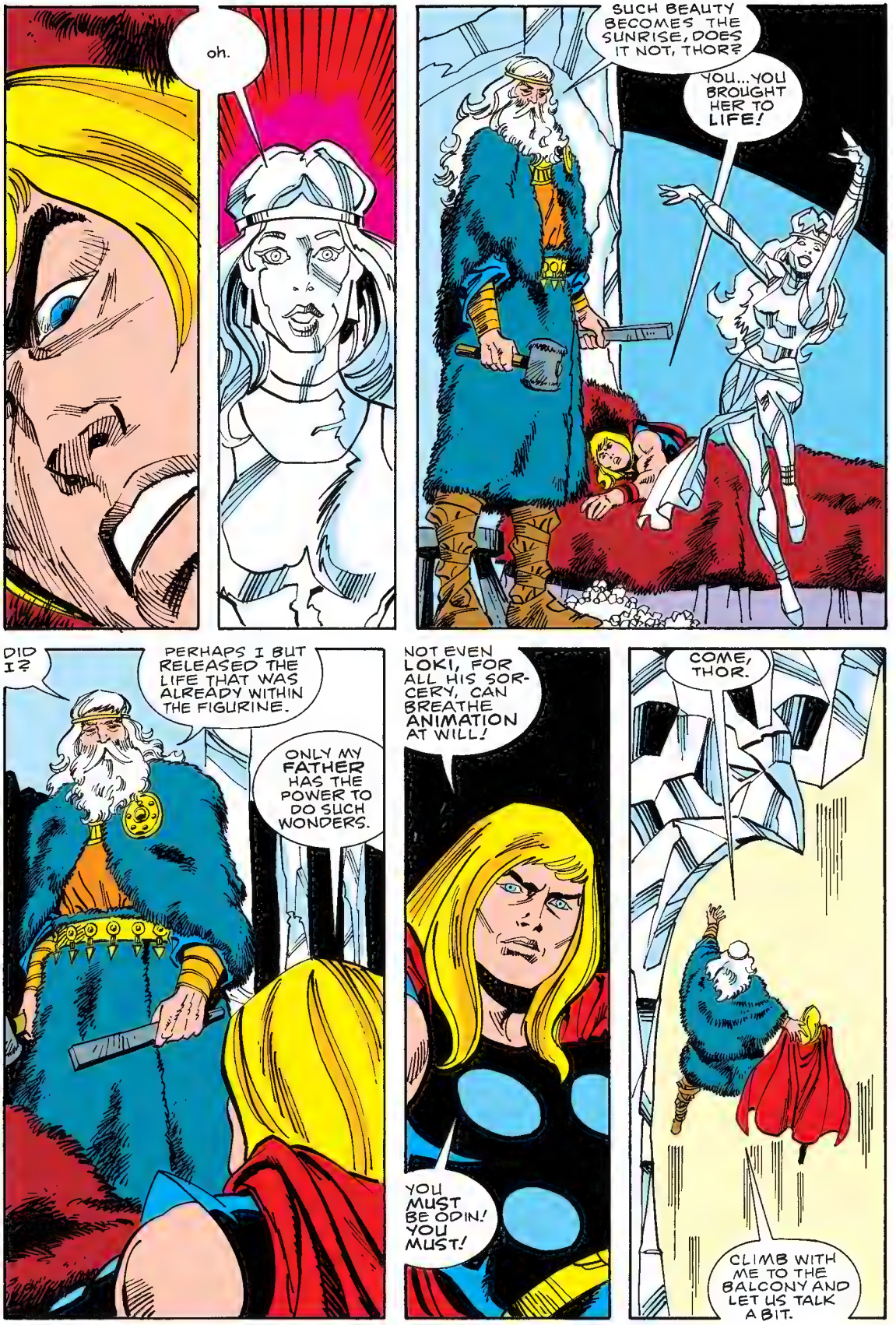
SO DEEP IN CONVERSATION ARE THEY THAT NEITHER SIF NOR BILL NOTICE THE SCENE THAT IS UNFOLDING BEHIND THEM ON 47TH STREET, ALSO KNOWN AS "DIAMOND ROW"!
TIMING'S PERFECT! THE JEWELRY EXCHANGE IS JUST ABOUT TO CLOSE!
AND AFTER THE DEMON ATTACKS OF THE PAST FEW DAYS, WHO'S GONNA PAY ANY ATTENTION TO US?
ESPECIALLY WHEN WE WON'T BE OUT HERE FOR MORE THAN A FEW SECONDS.
GET THAT ALARM SCRAMBLER ATTACHED, CORPORAL!
ALL SET, SIR!
THEN LET'S MOVE IT. WE'RE ABOUT TO MAKE OUR FORTUNES!
MORNING IN THE ICY WASTES OF ASGARD...
AWAKE, YOUNG SLEEPY-HEAD! THE BIRDS ARE UP, ALL OF NATURE IS STIRRING, AND STILL YOU LIE ABED?

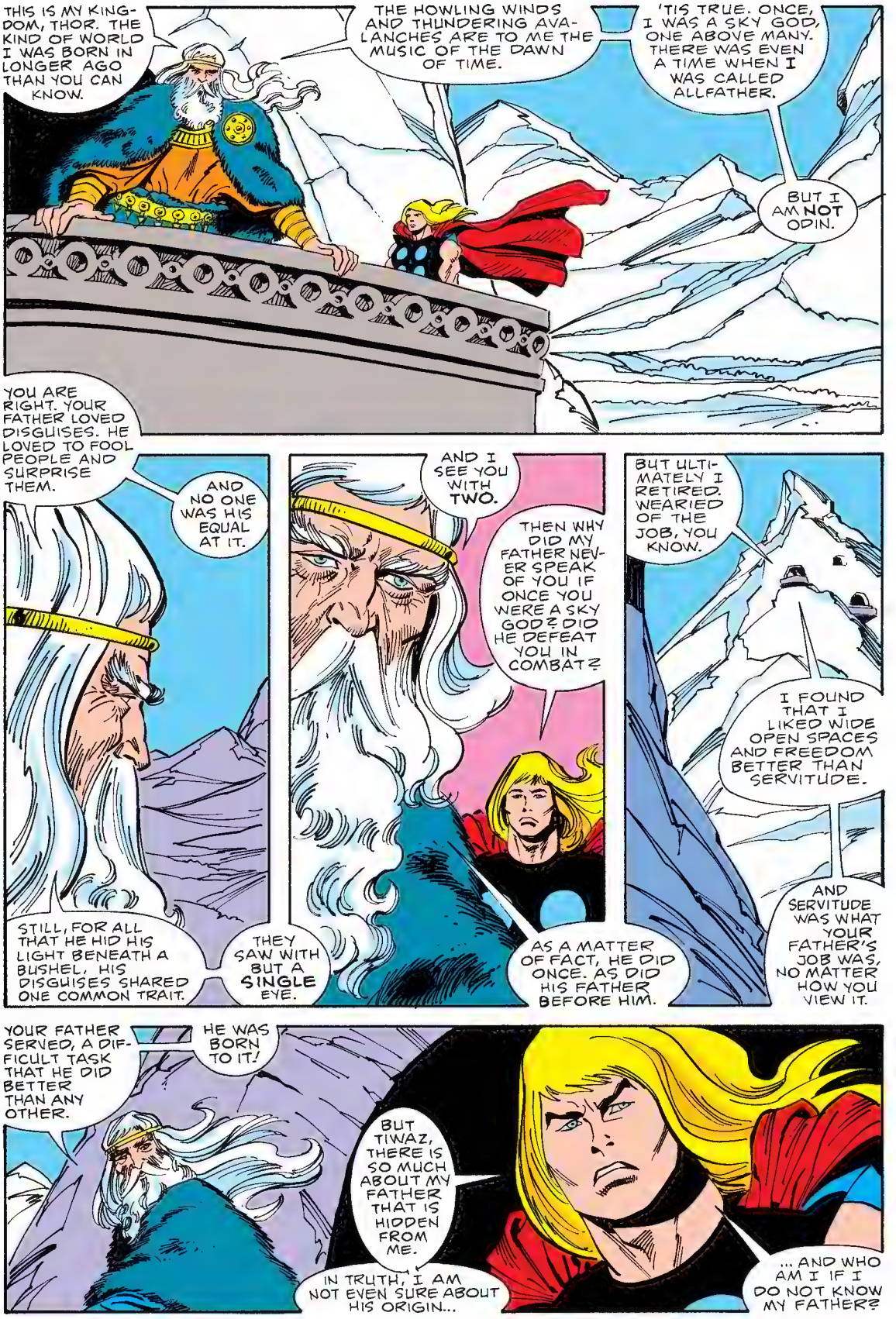

COME AND JOIN ME FOR A WALK! THE SUN IS ALREADY WELL UP IN THE SKY!
AND THERE IS MUCH TO SEE.
MY HOME, YOUNG THOR. THE SCULPTED ICE CANYONS, THE TOWERING GLACIERS, ALL THESE ARE MY DOMAIN.
A WORLD UNTO ITSELF.
OH, I KNOW THE TALES IN THE GOLDEN REALM. THAT THE LANDS TO THE NORTH ARE BARREN AND LIFELESS.
BUT LOOK AROUND YOU. EVEN HERE, LIFE HAS EVERYWHERE GAINED A FOOTHOLD.
AND WHERE THERE IS LIFE, THERE ALSO... IS DEATH.
TODAY, THE POLAR BEAR SLAYS THE SEAL.
TOMORROW, THE BEAR IN ITS TURN MAY FALL PREY TO THE HUNTER.
AN ANCIENT CYCLE, YOUNG THOR.
THERE IS NO SHAME IN LIVING. THERE SHOULD BE NONE IN DYING.
HOW STRANGE IT IS TO STAND HERE WITH SOMEONE COMPLETELY UNKNOWN IN ASGARD...
...AND YET FEEL AS THOUGH MY FATHER WERE STILL HERE BESIDE ME.
TELL ME, MY HOST, HAVE YOU A NAME?
I'VE HAD MANY NAMES, YOUNG LORDLING. TIWAZ WAS ONE THAT HAS SERVED AS WELL AS ANY.
COME. ANOTHER CYCLE IS COMPLETE, THE SUN IS SETTING.
LET US RETURN HOME.

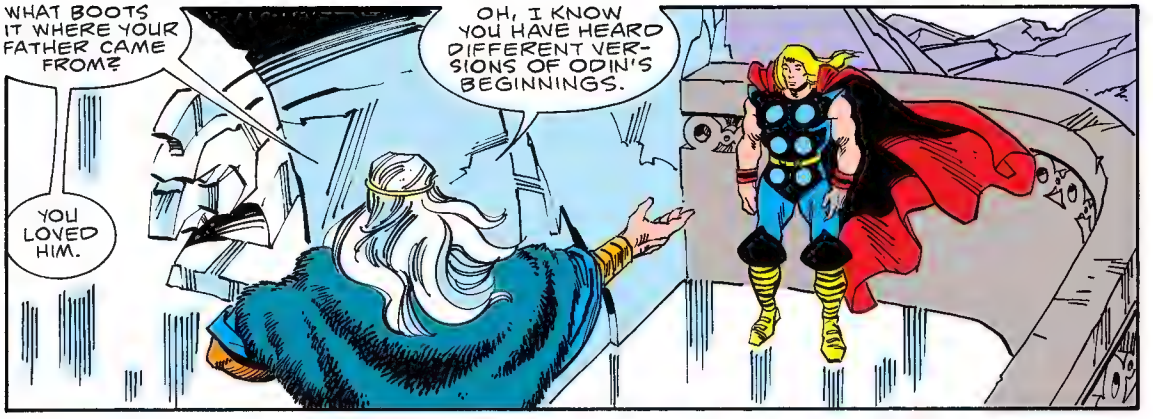
AH, NOTHING CAN EQUAL THE WARMTH OF THE BECKONING HEARTH AFTER A DAY'S JOURNEY, EH, THOR?
THOR?
MY HAMMER. NEXT TO MY BED. BUT IT MUST HAVE FALLEN WITH ME IN THE AVALANCHE!
HOW CAME IT HERE?
UNLESS--!!
TIWAZ! YOU! ONLY YOU COULD HAVE BROUGHT IT HITHER. AND NO ONE CAN LIFT MJOLNIR IN THE GOLDEN REALM SAVE ONLY MY FATHER...
...MY FATHER WHOSE LOVE OF DISGUISES IS LEGENDARY!
I HAVE HEARD MANY THINGS ABOUT YOUR FAMOUS WEAPON, THOR.
I HAVE HEARD THAT AMONG LIVING BEINGS, ONLY THOSE WHO ARE WORTHY CAN LIFT IT.
AND MY SERVANTS, THOR, ARE NOT LIVING BEINGS BUT SIMULACRA OF ICE.
YOU I COULD CARRY MYSELF. BUT MY SERVANTS WERE THE ONES WHO FOUND YOU AND YOUR HAMMER AFTER THE AVALANCHE AND BROUGHT YOU HERE.
IN TRUTH, I HAD FORGOT THEM!
JUST WHEN ONE THINKS HE HAS SEEN ALL THE WONDERS THAT THERE ARE TO SEE IN THE NINE WORLDS...
NOW, COME, THOR. WRESTLE ME AGAIN FOR YOUR SUPPER.
AND THIS TIME, SHOW ME YOUR METTLE!


NOT A BAD GRIP FOR SUCH A LITTLE GOD!
THAT'S IT! THAT'S IT!
YOU GROW STRONGER. FEW HAVE PUSHED ME BACK AS YOU ARE DOING NOW!
BUT FEWER STILL HAVE WON!
AHHGH!
MUCH BETTER, MY THOR!
BUT WE MUST WORK STILL TO RESTORE THE STRENGTH THAT YOUR ORDEAL HAS TAKEN FROM YOU.
SUPPER AWAITS US. WE NEED YET TO PUT SOME MEAT ON THOSE BONES.
YOU HAVE STAYED LONG ON MIDGARD, MIGHTY THOR. HAVE YOU NOT MISSED ASGARD AND ITS GLORY?
THE BLOOD OF EARTH IS MINE, TIWAZ, AS IS THE BLOOD OF GODS. EVER SHE CALLS TO ME.
AND WONDERS UNDREAMED OF HAS SHE SHOWN ME.
THEN MAY YOU RETURN SOON. FOR I DO NOT DOUBT THAT EARTH HAS NEED OF SUCH A DEFENDER.
AND NOW, MY BRAVE, TO BED.
THOR IS ASLEEP EVEN BEFORE THE CANDLE IS QUENCHED.

MEANWHILE, FAR AWAY ON THE EDGE OF ASGARD IN THE FORTRESS OF LOKI...
WE HAVE ARRIVED, LORELEI!
IT IS TRUE THEN? ODIN REALLY IS GONE?
YES, AND AT LAST THE WAY IS CLEAR TO THE THRONE OF ASGARD!
NO DOUBT, MY FELLOW ASGARDIANS WOULD PREFER A DULL AND PREDICTABLE FELLOW SUCH AS MY STEP-BROTHER TO RULE THEM.
BUT AM I NOT THE GOD WHO STOOD BETWEEN SURTUR AND THE FLAME WHEN ALL OTHERS HAD FALLEN?
IF THOR WERE TO SUPPORT MY EFFORT, WHY WHO THEN COULD SAY ME NAY?
AND IN THIS ENTERPRISE, LORELEI, I THINK YOU MAY BE A MOST PERSUASIVE ALLY.
MORNING IN THE WINTRY WASTES...
ANOTHER FIGURE IS COMPLETE.
AND NOW, MY FINE LADY, 'TIS TIME FOR YOU TO DANCE, IS IT NOT?
WOOOOOFF

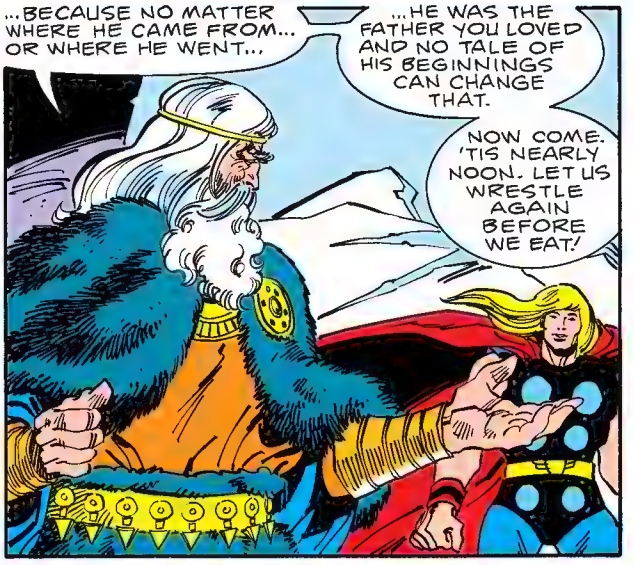

oh.
SUCH BEAUTY BECOMES THE SUNRISE, DOES IT NOT, THOR?
YOU...YOU BROUGHT HER TO LIFE!
DID I?
PERHAPS I BUT RELEASED THE LIFE THAT WAS ALREADY WITHIN THE FIGURINE.
ONLY MY FATHER HAS THE POWER TO DO SUCH WONDERS.
NOT EVEN LOKI, FOR ALL HIS SORCERY, CAN BREATHE ANIMATION AT WILL!
YOU MUST BE ODIN! YOU MUST!
COME, THOR.
CLIMB WITH ME TO THE BALCONY AND LET US TALK A BIT.

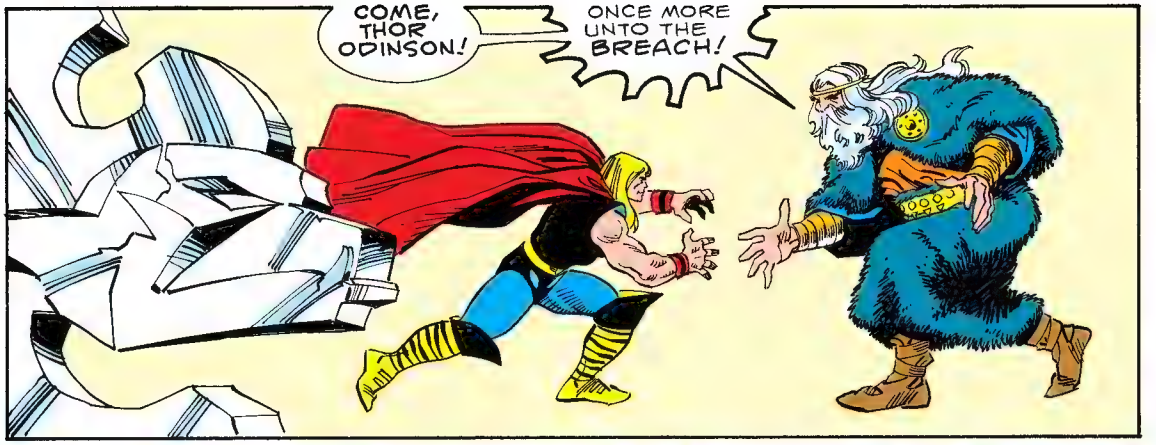

THIS IS MY KINGDOM, THOR. THE KIND OF WORLD I WAS BORN IN LONGER AGO THAN YOU CAN KNOW.
THE HOWLING WINDS AND THUNDERING AVALANCHES ARE TO ME THE MUSIC OF THE DAWN OF TIME.
'TIS TRUE. ONCE, I WAS A SKY GOD, ONE ABOVE MANY. THERE WAS EVEN A TIME WHEN I WAS CALLED ALLFATHER.
BUT I AM NOT ODIN.
YOU ARE RIGHT. YOUR FATHER LOVED DISGUISES. HE LOVED TO FOOL PEOPLE AND SURPRISE THEM.
AND NO ONE WAS HIS EQUAL AT IT.
STILL, FOR ALL THAT HE HID HIS LIGHT BENEATH A BUSHEL, HIS DISGUISES SHARED ONE COMMON TRAIT.
THEY SAW WITH BUT A SINGLE EYE.
AND I SEE YOU WITH TWO.
THEN WHY DID MY FATHER NEVER SPEAK OF YOU IF ONCE YOU WERE A SKY GOD? DID HE DEFEAT YOU IN COMBAT?
AS A MATTER OF FACT, HE DID ONCE. AS DID HIS FATHER BEFORE HIM.
BUT ULTIMATELY I RETIRED. WEARIED OF THE JOB, YOU KNOW.
I FOUND THAT I LIKED WIDE OPEN SPACES AND FREEDOM BETTER THAN SERVITUDE.
AND SERVITUDE WAS WHAT YOUR FATHER'S JOB WAS, NO MATTER HOW YOU VIEW IT.
YOUR FATHER SERVED, A DIFFICULT TASK THAT HE DID BETTER THAN ANY OTHER.
HE WAS BORN TO IT!
BUT TIWAZ, THERE IS SO MUCH ABOUT MY FATHER THAT IS HIDDEN FROM ME.
IN TRUTH, I AM NOT EVEN SURE ABOUT HIS ORIGIN...
... AND WHO AM I IF I DO NOT KNOW MY FATHER?



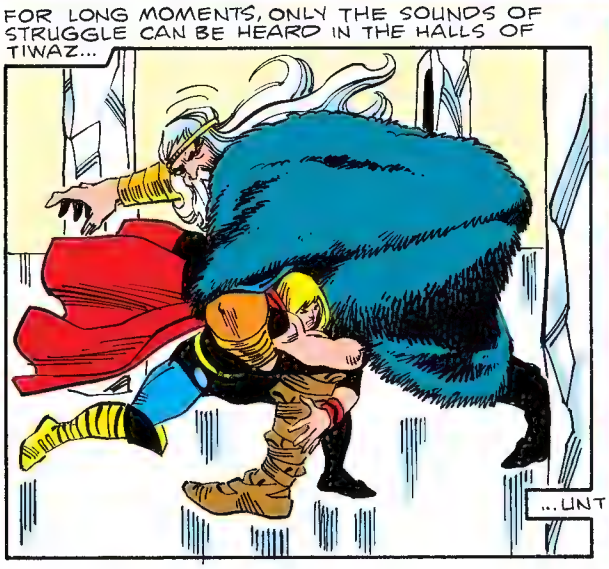
*THOR 294 IF YOU'RE KEEPING SCORE.

IN TRUTH, WERE I TOLD CONFLICTING STORIES BY MY FATHER AND A FLOATING EYEBALL...
...I KNOW WHICH I SHOULD BELIEVE.
BUT NONE OF THIS CAN TELL YOU MORE ABOUT YOUR FATHER THAN YOU ALREADY KNOW YOURSELF...


...BECAUSE NO MATTER WHERE HE CAME FROM... OR WHERE HE WENT...
...HE WAS THE FATHER YOU LOVED AND NO TALE OF HIS BEGINNINGS CAN CHANGE THAT.
NOW COME. 'TIS NEARLY NOON. LET US WRESTLE AGAIN BEFORE WE EAT!

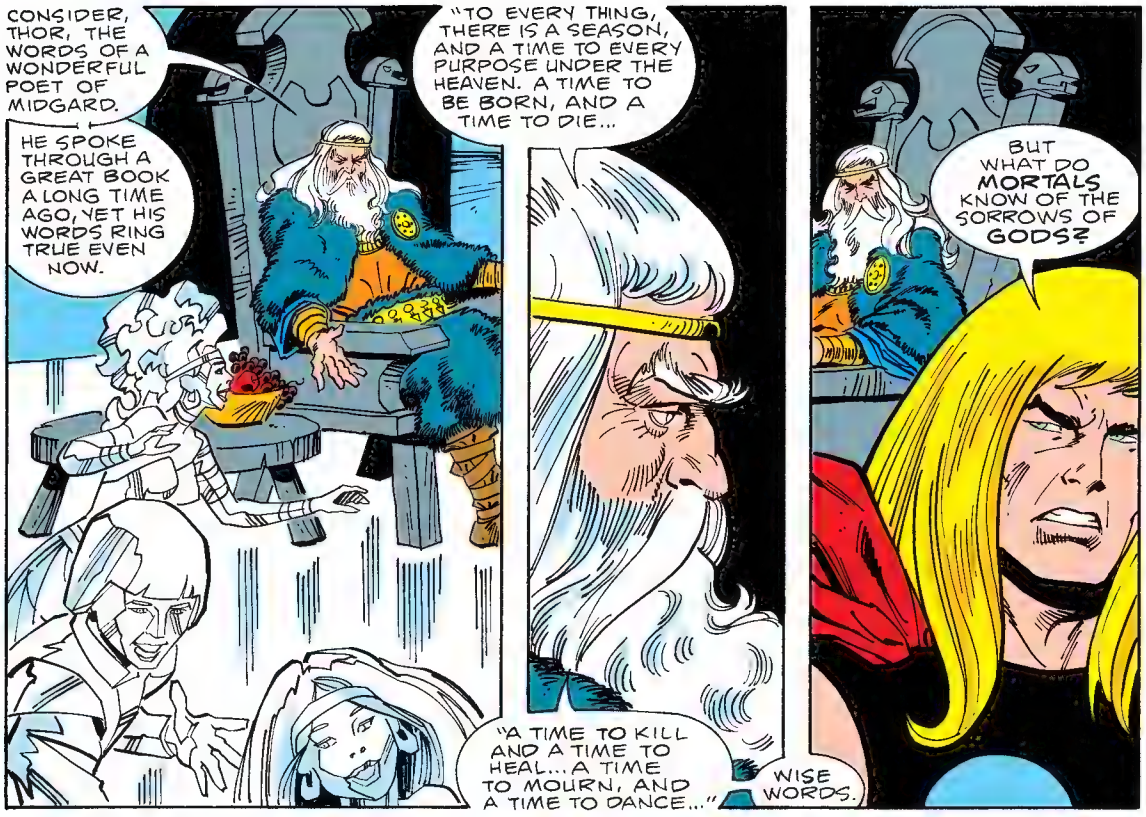

COME, THOR ODINSON!
ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH!

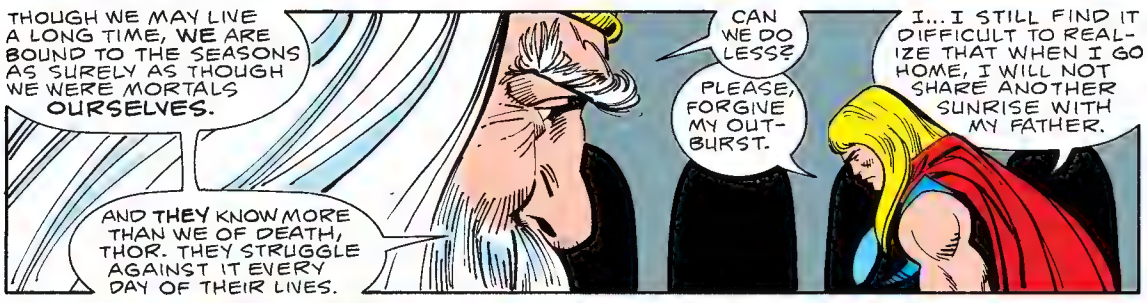
KO-THOOOM!

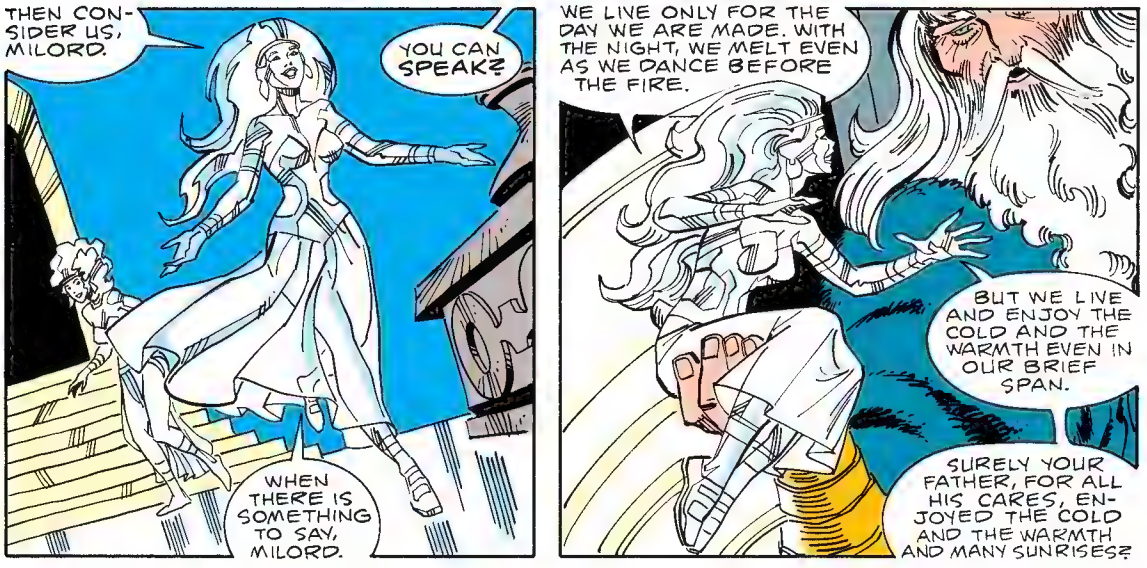

FOR LONG MOMENTS, ONLY THE SOUNDS OF STRUGGLE CAN BE HEARD IN THE HALLS OF TIWAZ...
...UNTIL...

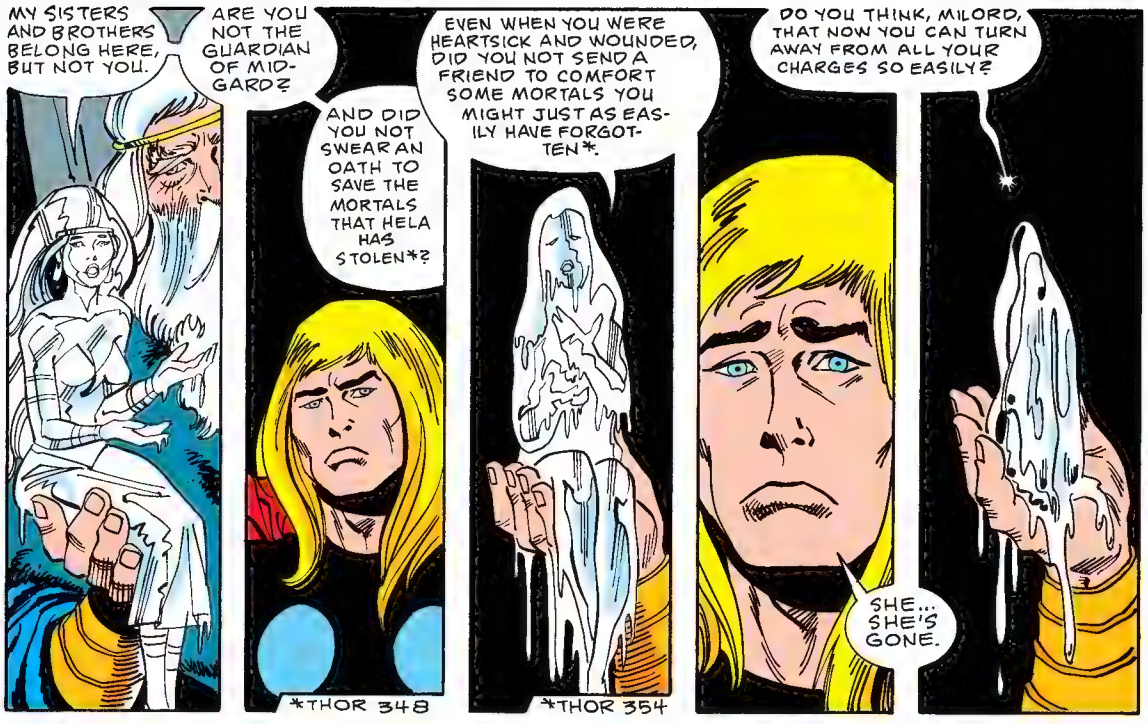
MY HEART IS NEARLY BURSTING. IF EVER I AM TO ACHIEVE VICTORY, IT MUST BE...

NOW!
SLAM!
AHHAHAHAHAHAH!
WELL THROWN, MY MIGHTY POPPET!
AS GOOD A MATCH AS I'VE HAD IN MANY AND MANY A YEAR!
AND NOW, ONE LAST TIME, YOU SHALL TAKE A MEAL WITH ME.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, TIWAZ, WHEN YOU SAY "ONE LAST TIME"?
I MEAN, MIGHTY THOR, THAT YOU ARE READY NOW TO LEAVE MY HUMBLE ABODE AND RETURN HOME, WHERE YOU BELONG.
THE BLOOM HATH RE-TURNED AGAIN TO YOUR CHEEKS.
AND THERE SHALL BE GREAT NEED OF THEE IN ASGARD, NOW THAT YOUR FATHER IS GONE.
I KNOW, TIWAZ, AND YET, I AM LOATHE TO LEAVE.
I FEEL MORE AT HOME HERE THAN I HAVE FELT IN MANY A DAY.
AND... MY FATHER'S LOSS STILL WEIGHS HEAVILY UPON ME. IF ONLY I HAD FOUGHT HARDER, BEEN STRONGER...

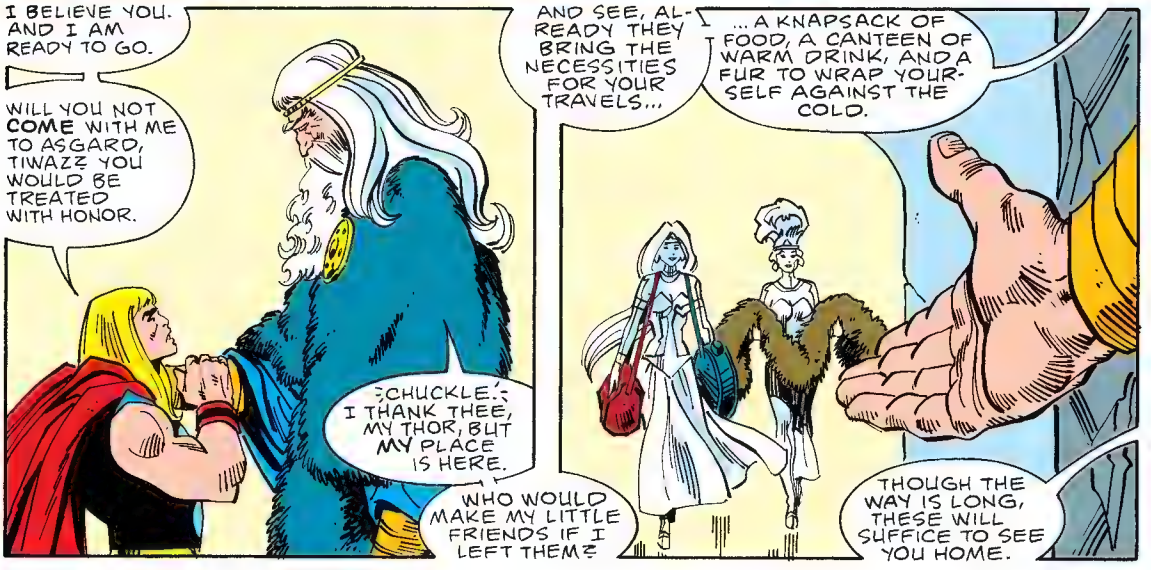

CONSIDER, THOR, THE WORDS OF A WONDERFUL POET OF MIDGARD.
HE SPOKE THROUGH A GREAT BOOK A LONG TIME AGO, YET HIS WORDS RING TRUE EVEN NOW.
"TO EVERY THING, THERE IS A SEASON, AND A TIME TO EVERY PURPOSE UNDER THE HEAVEN. A TIME TO BE BORN, AND A TIME TO DIE...
"A TIME TO KILL AND A TIME TO HEAL... A TIME TO MOURN, AND A TIME TO DANCE..."
WISE WORDS.
BUT WHAT DO MORTALS KNOW OF THE SORROWS OF GODS?


THOUGH WE MAY LIVE A LONG TIME, WE ARE BOUND TO THE SEASONS AS SURELY AS THOUGH WE WERE MORTALS OURSELVES.
AND THEY KNOW MORE THAN WE OF DEATH, THOR. THEY STRUGGLE AGAINST IT EVERY DAY OF THEIR LIVES.
CAN WE DO LESS?
PLEASE, FORGIVE MY OUTBURST.
I... I STILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO REALIZE THAT WHEN I GO HOME, I WILL NOT SHARE ANOTHER SUNRISE WITH MY FATHER.


THEN CONSIDER US, MILORD.
YOU CAN SPEAK?
WHEN THERE IS SOMETHING TO SAY, MILORD.
WE LIVE ONLY FOR THE DAY WE ARE MADE. WITH THE NIGHT, WE MELT EVEN AS WE DANCE BEFORE THE FIRE.
BUT WE LIVE AND ENJOY THE COLD AND THE WARMTH EVEN IN OUR BRIEF SPAN.
SURELY YOUR FATHER, FOR ALL HIS CARES, ENJOYED THE COLD AND THE WARMTH AND MANY SUNRISES?

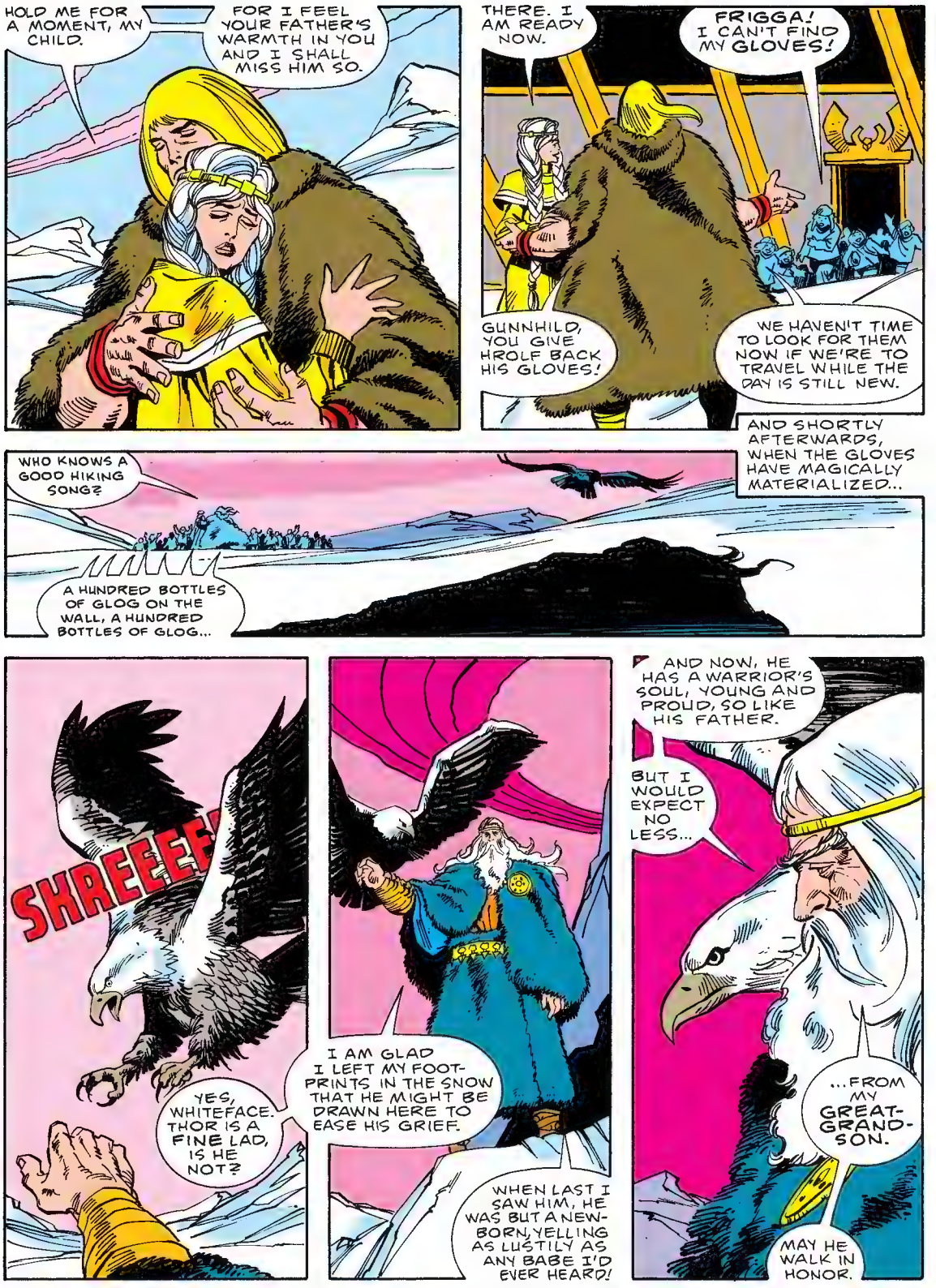

MY SISTERS AND BROTHERS BELONG HERE, BUT NOT YOU.
ARE YOU NOT THE GUARDIAN OF MIDGARD?
AND DID YOU NOT SWEAR AN OATH TO SAVE THE MORTALS THAT HELA HAS STOLEN*?
*THOR 348
EVEN WHEN YOU WERE HEARTSICK AND WOUNDED, DID YOU NOT SEND A FRIEND TO COMFORT SOME MORTALS YOU MIGHT JUST AS EASILY HAVE FORGOTTEN*.
*THOR 354
DO YOU THINK, MILORD, THAT NOW YOU CAN TURN AWAY FROM ALL YOUR CHARGES SO EASILY?
SHE... SHE'S GONE.

THE HEAT OF MY HAND, LORD THOR, OR THE HEAT OF THE FIRE.
YOU WILL NOT FORGET YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES, EVEN FOR GRIEF.
NOR WOULD YOUR FATHER, WHO CARRIED SO MANY BURDENS, HAVE WISHED IT.
YET HE HAD JOY AS WELL IN THE LIVING.
AS YOU WILL AGAIN WHEN TIME HAS HEALED YOUR HURT.
WYRD AND HER FATES RULE US ALL IN THE END.


I BELIEVE YOU. AND I AM READY TO GO.
WILL YOU NOT COME WITH ME TO ASGARD, TIWAZ? YOU WOULD BE TREATED WITH HONOR.
AND SEE, ALREADY THEY BRING THE NECESSITIES FOR YOUR TRAVELS...
... A KNAPSACK OF FOOD, A CANTEEN OF WARM DRINK, AND A FUR TO WRAP YOURSELF AGAINST THE COLD.
;CHUCKLE:; I THANK THEE, MY THOR, BUT MY PLACE IS HERE.
WHO WOULD MAKE MY LITTLE FRIENDS IF I LEFT THEM?
THOUGH THE WAY IS LONG, THESE WILL SUFFICE TO SEE YOU HOME.

YOU HAVE SAVED MY LIFE AND HOWEVER MUCH IT PUZZLES ME, THERE IS STILL SOMETHING OF MY FATHER IN YOU.
LIKE HIM, YOU HAVE GIVEN ME NEW HOPE.
I WISH, MY HOST, THAT SOMEHOW YOU WOULD LET ME REPAY YOUR GENEROSITY...
...AND YET, I HAVE SO LITTLE TO GIVE.
I WANT ONLY TO REMAIN UNDISTURBED, MY THOR, THOUGH I WOULD WELCOME YOUR PRESENCE ANYTIME YOU WISH TO RETURN.
BUT I NO LONGER DESIRE TO BE A GOD. I HAVE RETIRED... TO WATCH THE SUNRISES, THE BIRDS, THE STORMS UPON THE MOUNTAINSIDE.
BUT THERE IS SOMETHING YOU CAN DO FOR ME IF YOU WOULD.
NAME IT!
I HAVE HAD MY EYE ON SOME WANDERERS OVER IN A MOUNTAIN HOSTEL YONDER, JUST MAKING CERTAIN THAT THEY CAME TO NO HARM.
PERHAPS YOU MIGHT SEE THAT THEY, TOO, RETURN HOME SAFELY NOW THAT ALL DANGER HAS PASSED.
IT SHALL BE DONE!
THEN FAREWELL, MY THOR. GO IN PEACE.
FAREWELL, TIWAZ. I SHALL NEVER FORGET YOU AND YOUR LITTLE FRIENDS.
NOR I YOU, THUNDERER.

AND SO, THE NEXT MORNING, AS THOR ROUNDS A BEND IN THE TRAIL...
THERE AHEAD!
'TIS THE HOSTEL TIWAZ SPOKE OF.
AND WHAT HAVE WE HERE?
THOR!
HEY, EVERY-BODY! LOOK!
IT'S THOR!
FRIGGA! SEE WHO'S COME TO VISIT US!
I THINK, MY DEARS, THAT HE HAS COME TO TAKE US HOME. IS THAT NOT SO, THOR?
I... HAVE INDEED.
THEN GET YOUR THINGS TOGETHER, CHILDREN. FOR IT'S EARLY YET AND WE CAN BE WELL ON THE WAY BY SUN-DOWN.
ARE WE LEAVING AL-READY?
OH PHOOEY. VACATION'S OVER. UNLESS...
THOR...
OH, MY LADY FRIGGA, SOONER WOULD I HAVE DIED THAN TELL YOU WHAT I HAVE TO SAY.
THERE IS NO NEED TO SPEAK, MY DARLING. FOR I KNOW ALREADY THE TIDINGS YOU WOULD TELL.
I KNOW THAT I HAVE LOST MY HUSBAND AS YOU HAVE LOST YOUR FATHER.


HOLD ME FOR A MOMENT, MY CHILD.
FOR I FEEL YOUR FATHER'S WARMTH IN YOU AND I SHALL MISS HIM SO.
THERE. I AM READY NOW.
FRIGGA! I CAN'T FIND MY GLOVES!
GUNNHILD, YOU GIVE HROLF BACK HIS GLOVES!
WE HAVEN'T TIME TO LOOK FOR THEM NOW IF WE'RE TO TRAVEL WHILE THE DAY IS STILL NEW.
AND SHORTLY AFTERWARDS, WHEN THE GLOVES HAVE MAGICALLY MATERIALIZED...
WHO KNOWS A GOOD HIKING SONG?
A HUNDRED BOTTLES OF GLOG ON THE WALL, A HUNDRED BOTTLES OF GLOG...
SHREEEE!
YES, WHITEFACE. THOR IS A FINE LAD, IS HE NOT?
I AM GLAD I LEFT MY FOOT-PRINTS IN THE SNOW THAT HE MIGHT BE DRAWN HERE TO EASE HIS GRIEF.
WHEN LAST I SAW HIM, HE WAS BUT A NEW-BORN, YELLING AS LUSTILY AS ANY BABE I'D EVER HEARD!
AND NOW, HE HAS A WARRIOR'S SOUL, YOUNG AND PROUD, SO LIKE HIS FATHER.
BUT I WOULD EXPECT NO LESS...
...FROM MY GREAT-GRAND-SON.
MAY HE WALK IN HONOR.

WALT SIMONSON
SCRIPTER

SAL BUSCEMA
GUESTARTIST

JOHN WORKMAN
LETTERER

CHRISTIE SCHEELE
COLORIST

RALPH MACCHIO
EDITOR

JIM SHOOTER
EDITOR IN CHIEF

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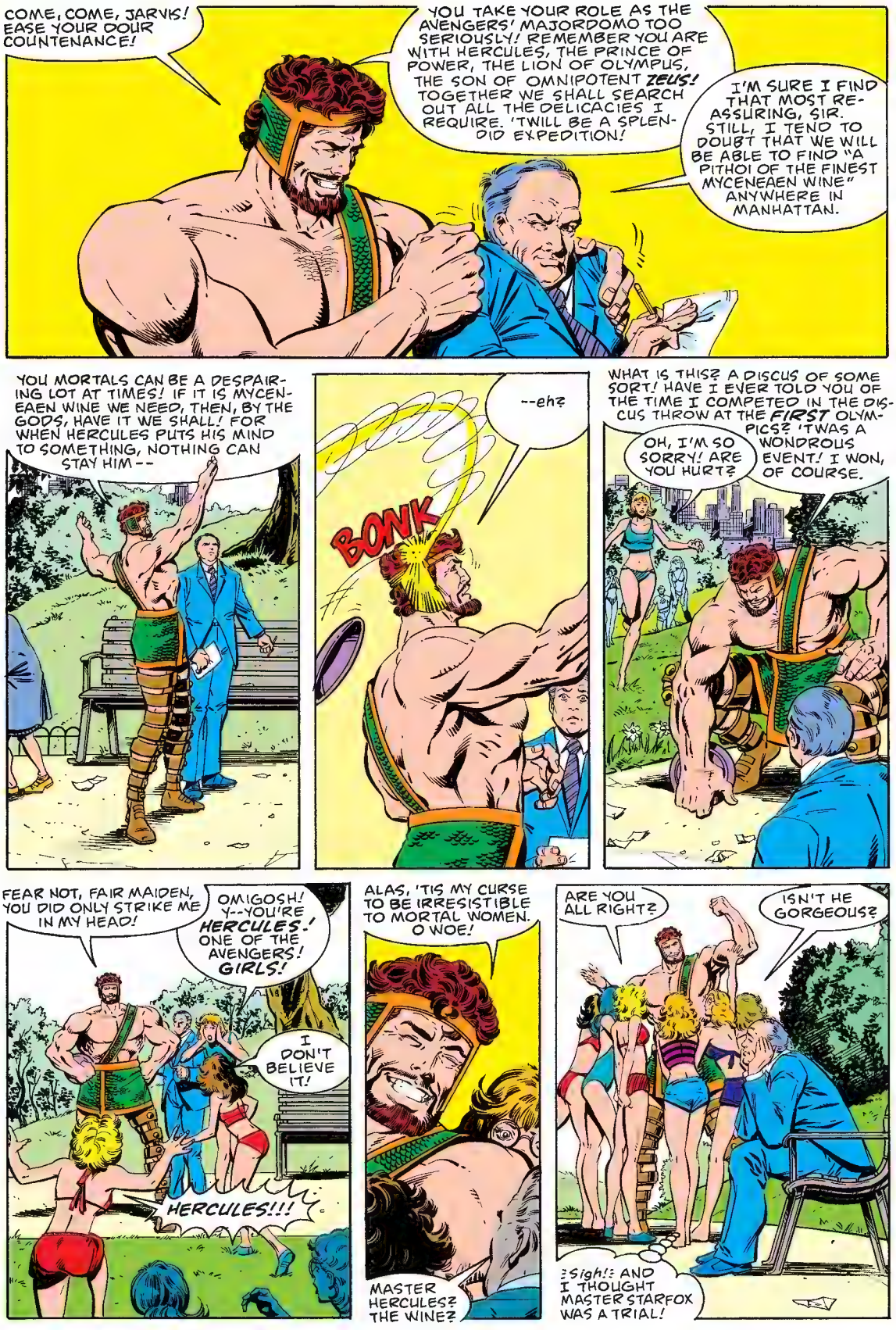
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
the mighty
THOR®
STAND ASIDE, THUNDER GOD-- WALT SIMONSON IS ON VACATION AND SO ART THOU!
OH, HERKY-- YOU'RE SO... SO GODLY!!!
FEATURING A THOR-HERCULES CLASH YOU'RE NOT GONNA BELIEVE!
BOB JACKSON

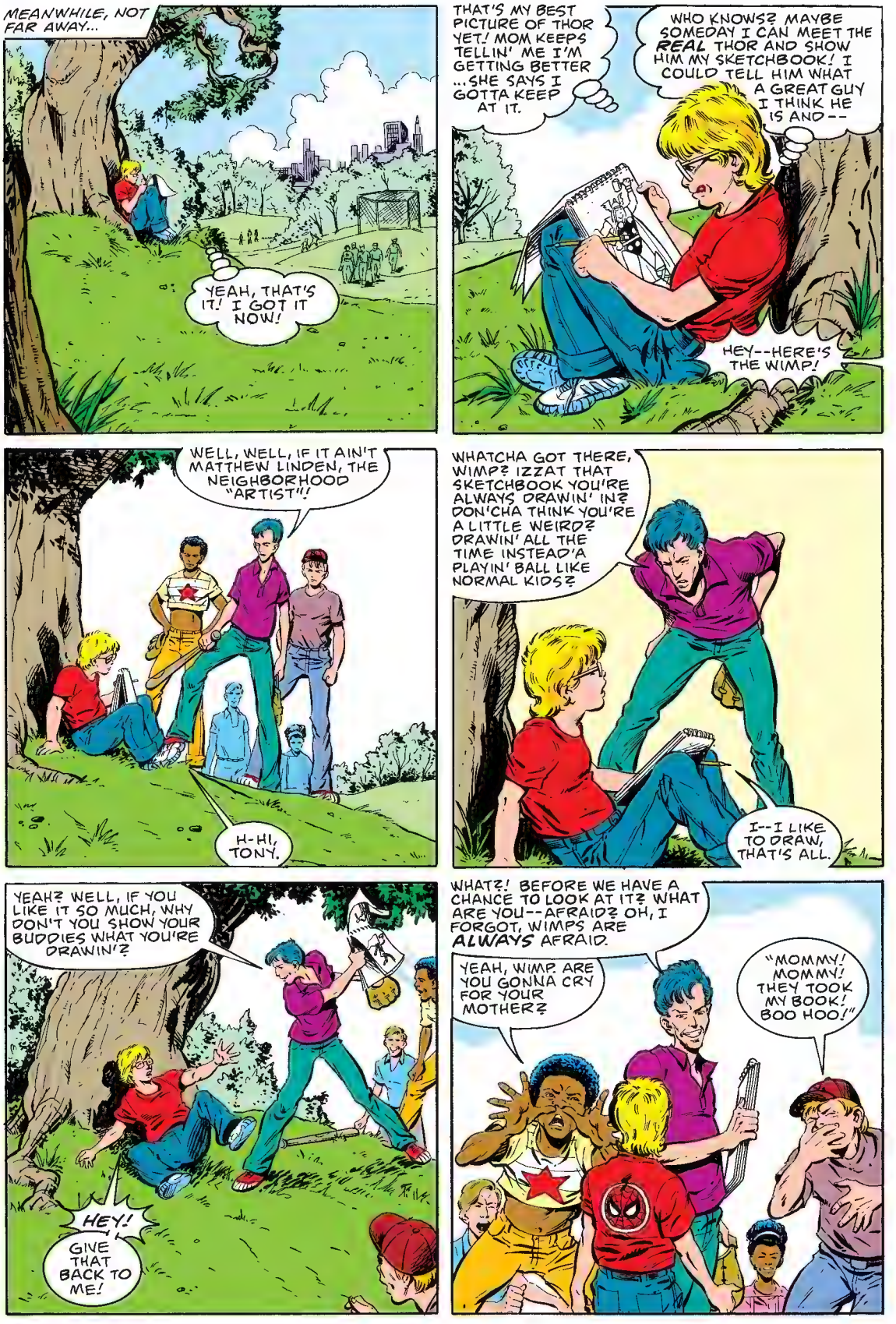
STAN LEE PRESENTS: the MIGHTY THOR®

THE POWER AND THE PRIDE!

AH, 'TIS A GLORIOUS DAY, FRIEND JARVIS! INDEED, 'TIS FITTING WEATHER FOR THE DAY UPON WHICH I HAVE CHOSEN TO SURPRISE MY COMPANIONS, THE MIGHTY AVENGERS, WITH A FEAST THAT WOULD DELIGHT THE GODS OF OLYMPUS!
YES, OF COURSE, MASTER HERCULES. I JUST HOPE THAT WE WILL BE ABLE TO FIND SOME OF THE MORE ...UNUSUAL... INGREDIENTS YOUR DINNER REQUIRES.
WALT + WEEZIE

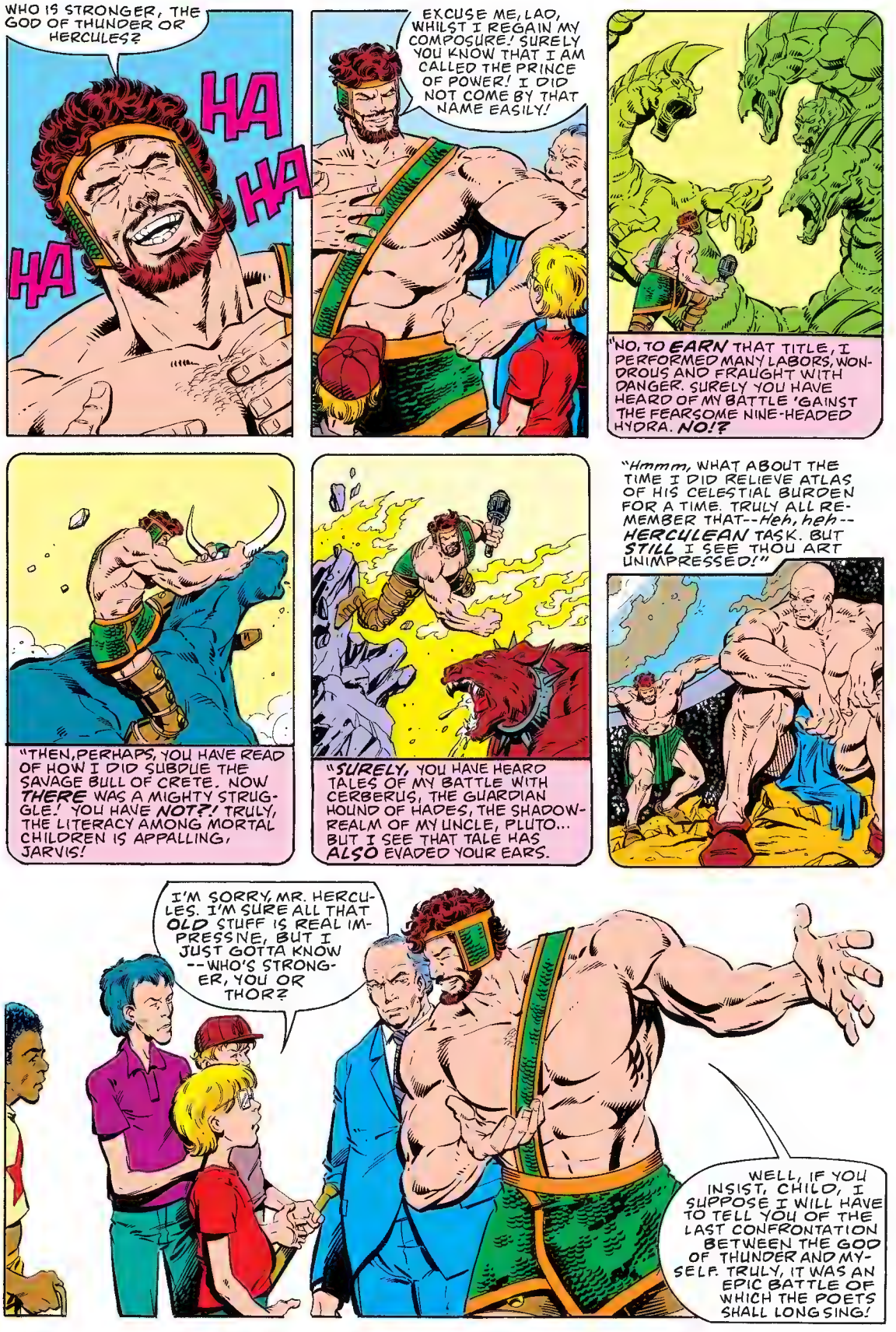
BOB HARRAS WRITER | JACKSON GUICE PENCILLER | BOB LAYTON INKER | JOHN WORKMAN LETTERER | CHRISTIE SCHEELE COLORIST | MARK GRUENWALD GUEST EDITOR | JIM SHOOTER EDITOR IN CHIEF

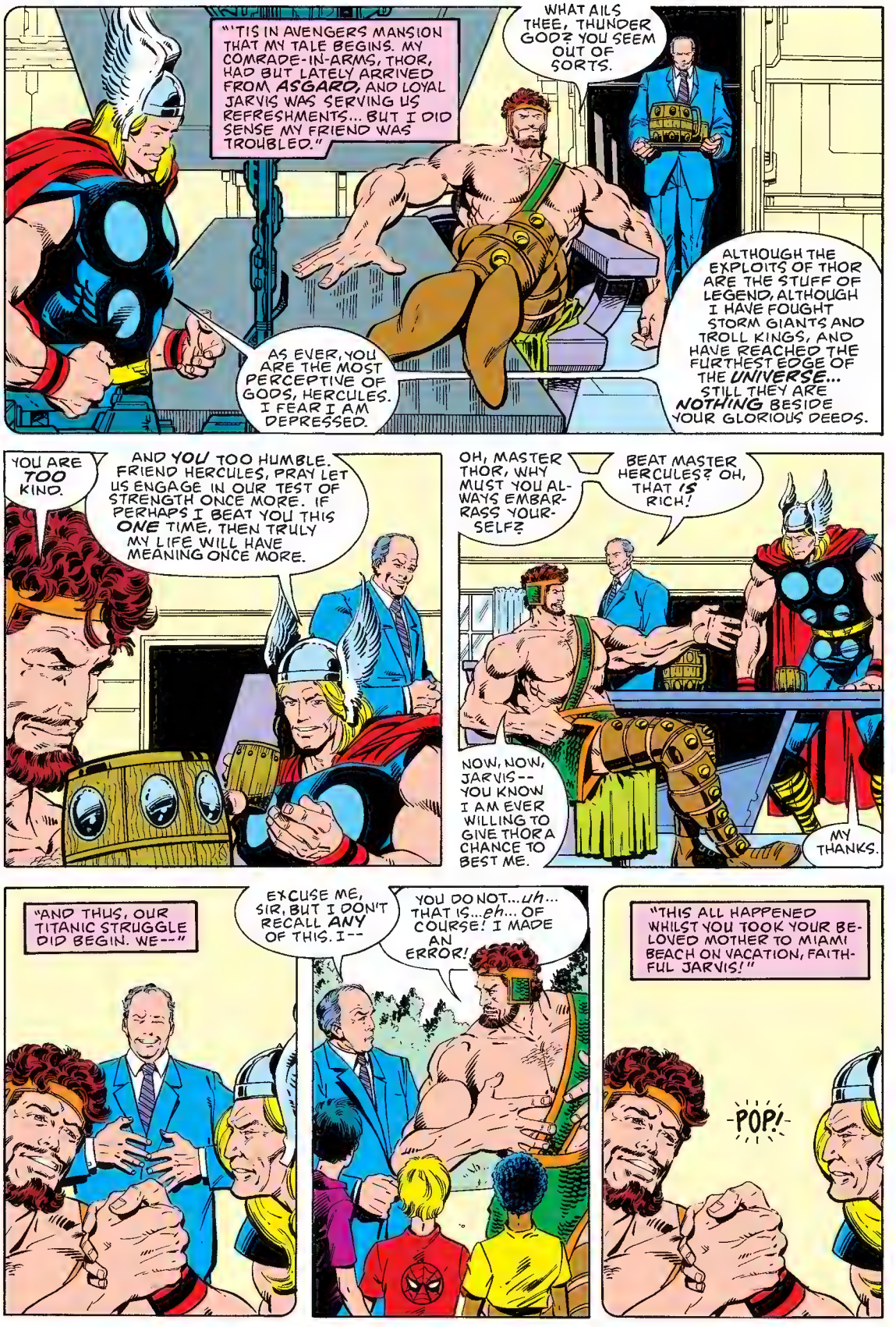

COME, COME, JARVIS! EASE YOUR DOUR COUNTENANCE!
YOU TAKE YOUR ROLE AS THE AVENGERS' MAJORDOMO TOO SERIOUSLY! REMEMBER YOU ARE WITH HERCULES, THE PRINCE OF POWER, THE LION OF OLYMPUS, THE SON OF OMNIPOTENT ZEUS! TOGETHER WE SHALL SEARCH OUT ALL THE DELICACIES I REQUIRE. 'TWILL BE A SPLENDID EXPEDITION!
I'M SURE I FIND THAT MOST REASSURING, SIR. STILL, I TEND TO DOUBT THAT WE WILL BE ABLE TO FIND "A PITHOI OF THE FINEST MYCENEAEN WINE" ANYWHERE IN MANHATTAN.
YOU MORTALS CAN BE A DESPAIRING LOT AT TIMES! IF IT IS MYCENEAEN WINE WE NEED, THEN, BY THE GODS, HAVE IT WE SHALL! FOR WHEN HERCULES PUTS HIS MIND TO SOMETHING, NOTHING CAN STAY HIM--
BONK
--eh?
WHAT IS THIS? A DISCUS OF SOME SORT! HAVE I EVER TOLD YOU OF THE TIME I COMPETED IN THE DISCUS THROW AT THE FIRST OLYMPICS? 'TWAS A WONDROUS EVENT! I WON, OF COURSE.
OH, I'M SO SORRY! ARE YOU HURT?
FEAR NOT, FAIR MAIDEN, YOU DID ONLY STRIKE ME IN MY HEAD!
OMIGOSH! Y--YOU'RE HERCULES! ONE OF THE AVENGERS! GIRLS!
I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
HERCULES!!!
ALAS, 'TIS MY CURSE TO BE IRRESISTIBLE TO MORTAL WOMEN. O WOE!
MASTER HERCULES? THE WINE?
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
ISN'T HE GORGEOUS?
SIGH!! AND I THOUGHT MASTER STARFOX WAS A TRIAL!

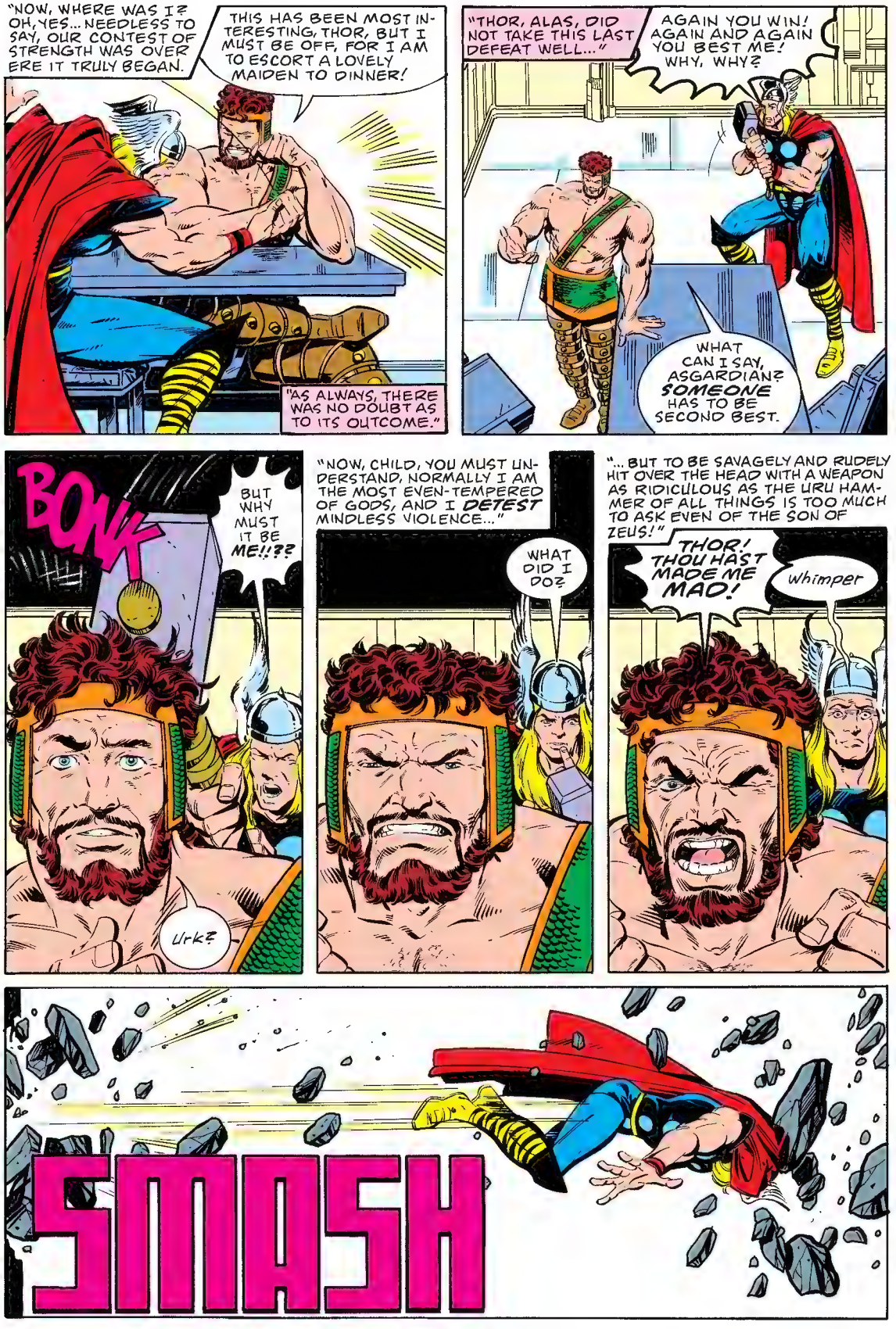

MEANWHILE, NOT FAR AWAY...
YEAH, THAT'S IT! I GOT IT NOW!
THAT'S MY BEST PICTURE OF THOR YET! MOM KEEPS TELLIN' ME I'M GETTING BETTER ...SHE SAYS I GOTTA KEEP AT IT.
WHO KNOWS? MAYBE SOMEDAY I CAN MEET THE REAL THOR AND SHOW HIM MY SKETCHBOOK! I COULD TELL HIM WHAT A GREAT GUY I THINK HE IS AND--
HEY--HERE'S THE WIMP!
WELL, WELL, IF IT AIN'T MATTHEW LINDEN, THE NEIGHBORHOOD "ARTIST"!
H-HI, TONY.
WHATCHA GOT THERE, WIMP? IZZAT THAT SKETCHBOOK YOU'RE ALWAYS DRAWIN' IN? DON'CHA THINK YOU'RE A LITTLE WEIRD? DRAWIN' ALL THE TIME INSTEAD'A PLAYIN' BALL LIKE NORMAL KIDS?
I--I LIKE TO DRAW, THAT'S ALL.
YEAH? WELL, IF YOU LIKE IT SO MUCH, WHY DON'T YOU SHOW YOUR BUDDIES WHAT YOU'RE DRAWIN'?
HEY! GIVE THAT BACK TO ME!
WHAT?! BEFORE WE HAVE A CHANCE TO LOOK AT IT? WHAT ARE YOU--AFRAID? OH, I FORGOT, WIMPS ARE ALWAYS AFRAID.
YEAH, WIMP. ARE YOU GONNA CRY FOR YOUR MOTHER?
"MOMMY! MOMMY! THEY TOOK MY BOOK! BOO HOO!"

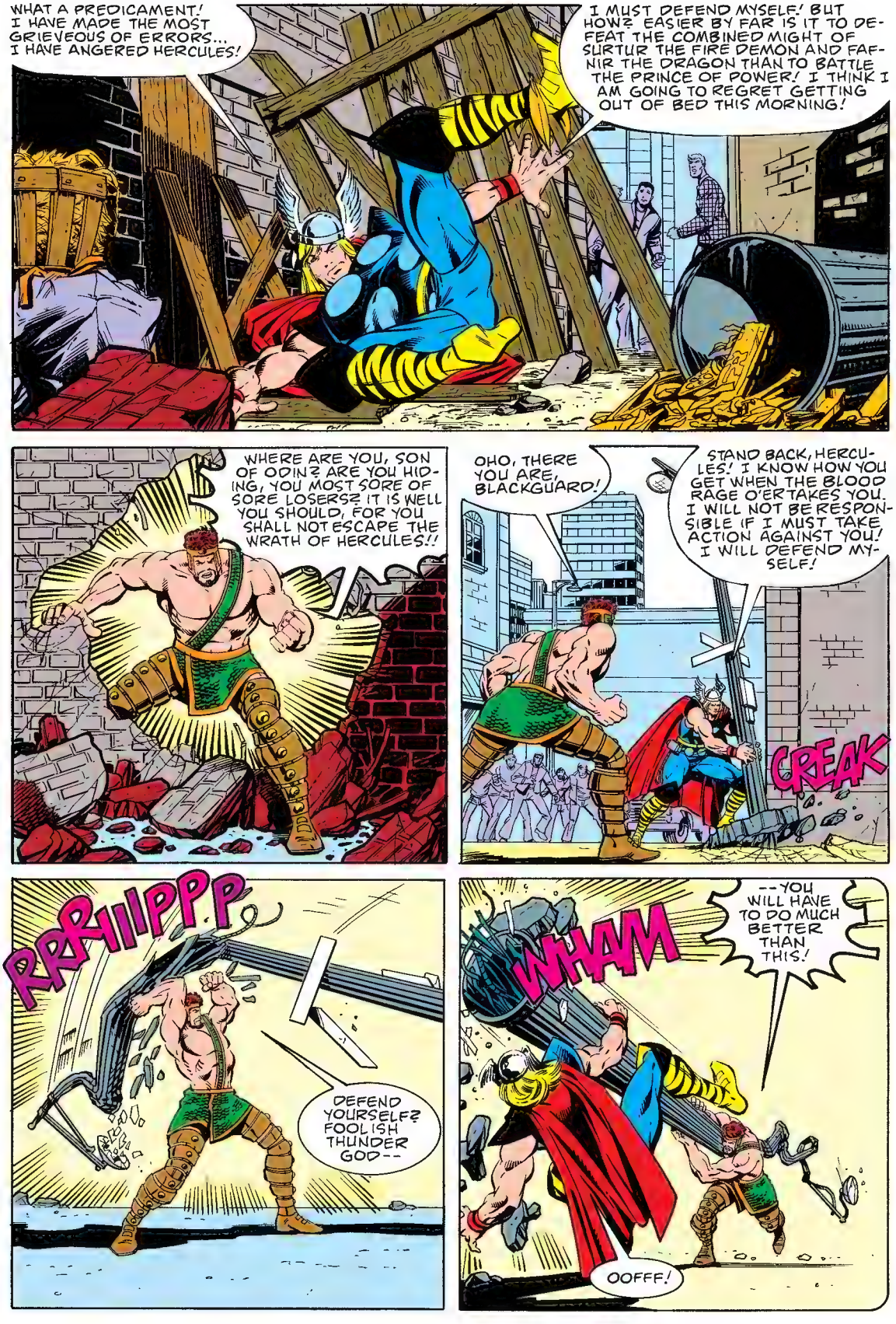
LESSEE WHAT WE GOT HERE! HEY, ALL THIS IS IS A BUNCHA PICTURES OF THAT THOR SUPER-GUY. WHAT'S HE--YOUR IDEAL OR SOMETHIN'? FIGURES YOU'D LIKE A GUY LIKE THAT-- A REAL WEIRDO WHO TALKS FUNNY AND HAS LONG HAIR. WHATSAMATTER WITH REAL HEROES LIKE THE TORCH OR SPIDER-MAN? NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR YOU?
HEY, TONY, I BET THE WIMP LIKES THOR CUZ THOR'S A TWERP JUST LIKE HE IS.
PLEASE, TONY, GIMME MY BOOK BACK. I WASN'T BOTHERIN' YOU OR NOTHIN'. I ONLY WANNA DRAW, SO CAN I HAVE IT BACK? PLEASE?
WHY? SO'S YOUR MOTHER CAN SHOW YOUR PICTURES AROUND LIKE YOU'RE SPECIAL OR SOMETHIN'? NO WAY!
SHRIIIIPP
BESIDES, WHO'D WANNA SEE PICTURES OF A LOSER LIKE THOR ANYWAY?
M-MY PICTURE!
Y-YOU THINK YOU'RE HOT STUFF, TONY, 'CUZ YOU'RE BIGGER THAN ME AND YOU CAN BEAT ME UP-- BUT YOU CAN'T BEAT THOR UP! HE'S A HUNDRED TIMES BETTER THAN YOUR STUPID HEROES!
YOU THINK SO, RUNT? PROVE IT.

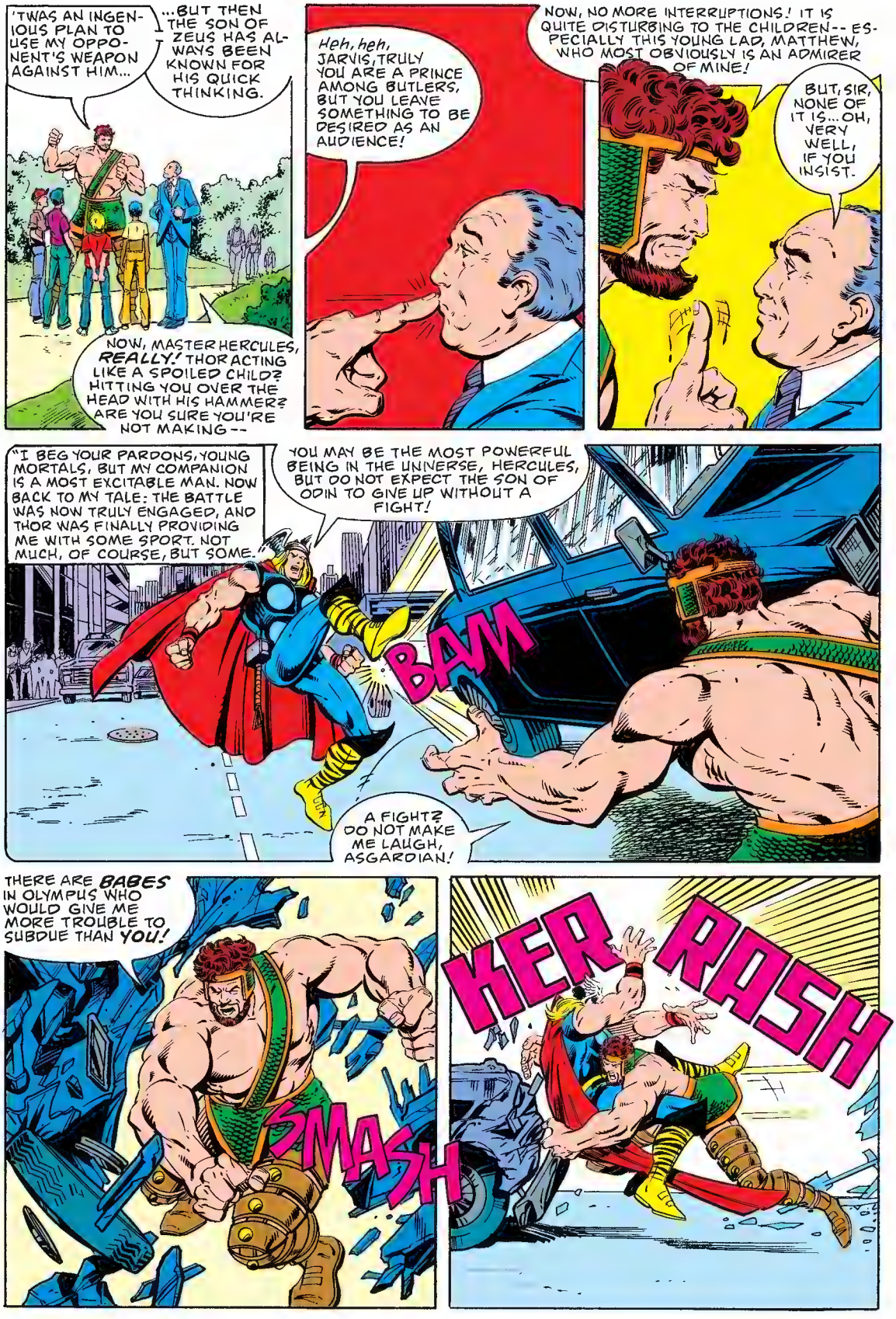
I DON'T HAVE TO PROVE ANYTHING TO YOU, TONY--
SURE YOU DO, KID. THAT IS, IF YOU DON'T WANT YOUR LITTLE PICTURE BOOK TO END UP IN TOMORROW'S TRASH.
HEY, TONY, WOULDJA GET A LOADA THIS!
HOLY COW! IT'S THAT HERCULES GUY FROM THE AVENGERS!
MY APOLOGIES FOR OUR DELAY, JARVIS! BUT, IN TRUTH, WHAT WAS I TO DO? TO ABANDON MY ADMIRERS WOULD HAVE BEEN CONDUCT UNBECOMING AN AVENGER! AH, THE PRICE OF FAME IS WEARYING!
I'M SURE YOU FIND IT MOST DEBILITATING, MASTER HERCULES.
THERE'S THE WAY YOU CAN PROVE YOUR BUDDY THOR IS SO STRONG. YOU CAN ASK HERCULES. EVERYBODY KNOWS THEY'RE REAL TIGHT.
I--I CAN'T TALK TO HIM--HE'S AN AVENGER!
WHAT ARE YOU, CHICKEN? GO ON, GET OUT THERE!
HEY, HERK! MY BUDDY WANTS TO ASK YOU SOMETHIN'!
DON'T PUSH!
WHAT'S THIS?
A YOUNG BOY APPARENTLY AWESTRUCK IN THE PRESENCE OF MIGHTY HERCULES. TUT, TUT, LAD, COME, YOU HAVE A QUESTION FOR THE LION OF OLYMPUS? SPEAK!
um-- er-- WELL-- er--WHO'S STRONGER, MR. HERCULES, SIR, YOU OR THOR?

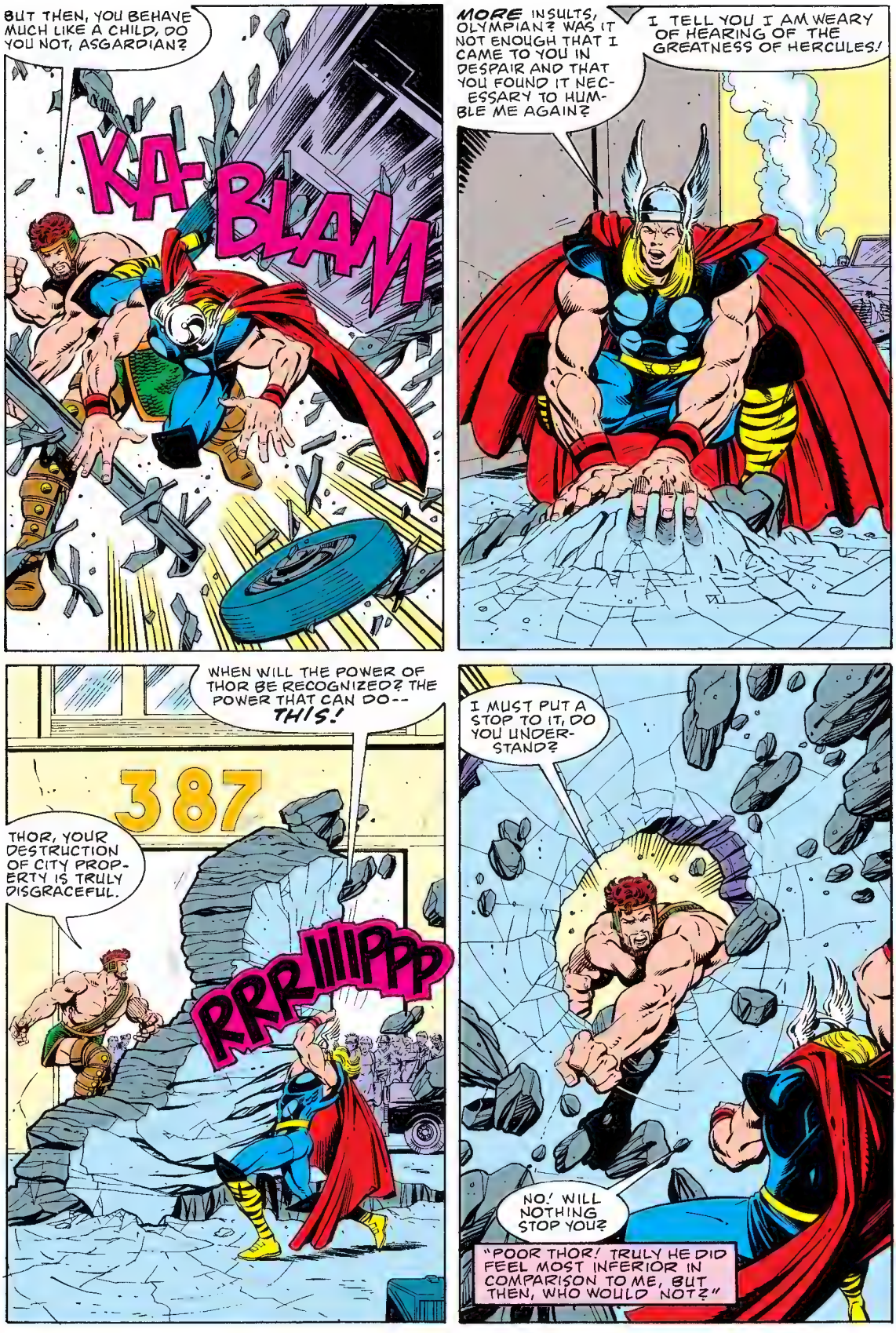

WHO IS STRONGER, THE GOD OF THUNDER OR HERCULES?
HA
HA
HA
EXCUSE ME, LAO, WHILST I REGAIN MY COMPOSURE! SURELY YOU KNOW THAT I AM CALLED THE PRINCE OF POWER! I DID NOT COME BY THAT NAME EASILY!
"NO, TO EARN THAT TITLE, I PERFORMED MANY LABORS, WONDROUS AND FRAUGHT WITH DANGER. SURELY YOU HAVE HEARD OF MY BATTLE 'GAINST THE FEARSOME NINE-HEADED HYDRA. NO!?
"THEN, PERHAPS, YOU HAVE READ OF HOW I DID SUBDUE THE SAVAGE BULL OF CRETE. NOW THERE WAS A MIGHTY STRUGGLE! YOU HAVE NOT?! TRULY, THE LITERACY AMONG MORTAL CHILDREN IS APPALLING, JARVIS!
"SURELY, YOU HAVE HEARD TALES OF MY BATTLE WITH CERBERUS, THE GUARDIAN HOUND OF HADES, THE SHADOW-REALM OF MY UNCLE, PLUTO... BUT I SEE THAT TALE HAS ALSO EVADED YOUR EARS.
"Hmmm, WHAT ABOUT THE TIME I DID RELIEVE ATLAS OF HIS CELESTIAL BURDEN FOR A TIME. TRULY ALL REMEMBER THAT--Heh, heh--HERCULEAN TASK. BUT STILL I SEE THOU ART UNIMPRESSED!"
I'M SORRY, MR. HERCULES. I'M SURE ALL THAT OLD STUFF IS REAL IMPRESSIVE, BUT I JUST GOTTA KNOW --WHO'S STRONGER, YOU OR THOR?
WELL, IF YOU INSIST, CHILD, I SUPPOSE I WILL HAVE TO TELL YOU OF THE LAST CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE GOD OF THUNDER AND MYSELF. TRULY, IT WAS AN EPIC BATTLE OF WHICH THE POETS SHALL LONG SING!

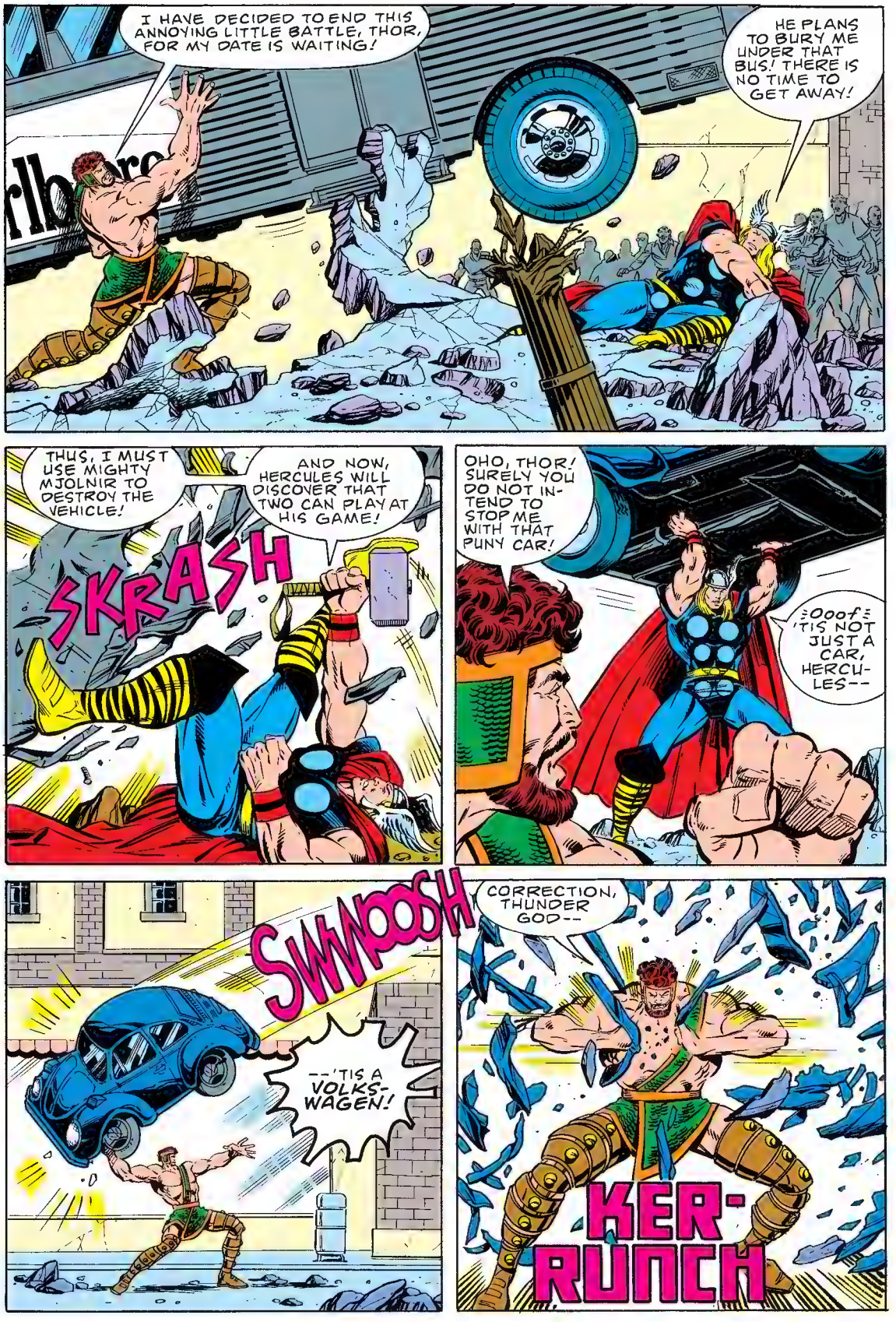

"'TIS IN AVENGERS MANSION THAT MY TALE BEGINS. MY COMRADE-IN-ARMS, THOR, HAD BUT LATELY ARRIVED FROM ASGARD, AND LOYAL JARVIS WAS SERVING US REFRESHMENTS... BUT I DID SENSE MY FRIEND WAS TROUBLED."
WHAT AILS THEE, THUNDER GOD? YOU SEEM OUT OF SORTS.
AS EVER, YOU ARE THE MOST PERCEPTIVE OF GODS, HERCULES. I FEAR I AM DEPRESSED.
ALTHOUGH THE EXPLOITS OF THOR ARE THE STUFF OF LEGEND, ALTHOUGH I HAVE FOUGHT STORM GIANTS AND TROLL KINGS, AND HAVE REACHED THE FURTHEST EDGE OF THE UNIVERSE... STILL THEY ARE NOTHING BESIDE YOUR GLORIOUS DEEDS.
YOU ARE TOO KIND.
AND YOU TOO HUMBLE. FRIEND HERCULES, PRAY LET US ENGAGE IN OUR TEST OF STRENGTH ONCE MORE. IF PERHAPS I BEAT YOU THIS ONE TIME, THEN TRULY MY LIFE WILL HAVE MEANING ONCE MORE.
OH, MASTER THOR, WHY MUST YOU ALWAYS EMBARRASS YOURSELF?
BEAT MASTER HERCULES? OH, THAT IS RICH!
NOW, NOW, JARVIS-- YOU KNOW I AM EVER WILLING TO GIVE THOR A CHANCE TO BEST ME.
MY THANKS.
"AND THUS, OUR TITANIC STRUGGLE DID BEGIN. WE--"
EXCUSE ME, SIR, BUT I DON'T RECALL ANY OF THIS. I--
YOU DO NOT... uh... THAT IS... eh... OF COURSE! I MADE AN ERROR!
"THIS ALL HAPPENED WHILST YOU TOOK YOUR BELOVED MOTHER TO MIAMI BEACH ON VACATION, FAITHFUL JARVIS!"
-POP!-

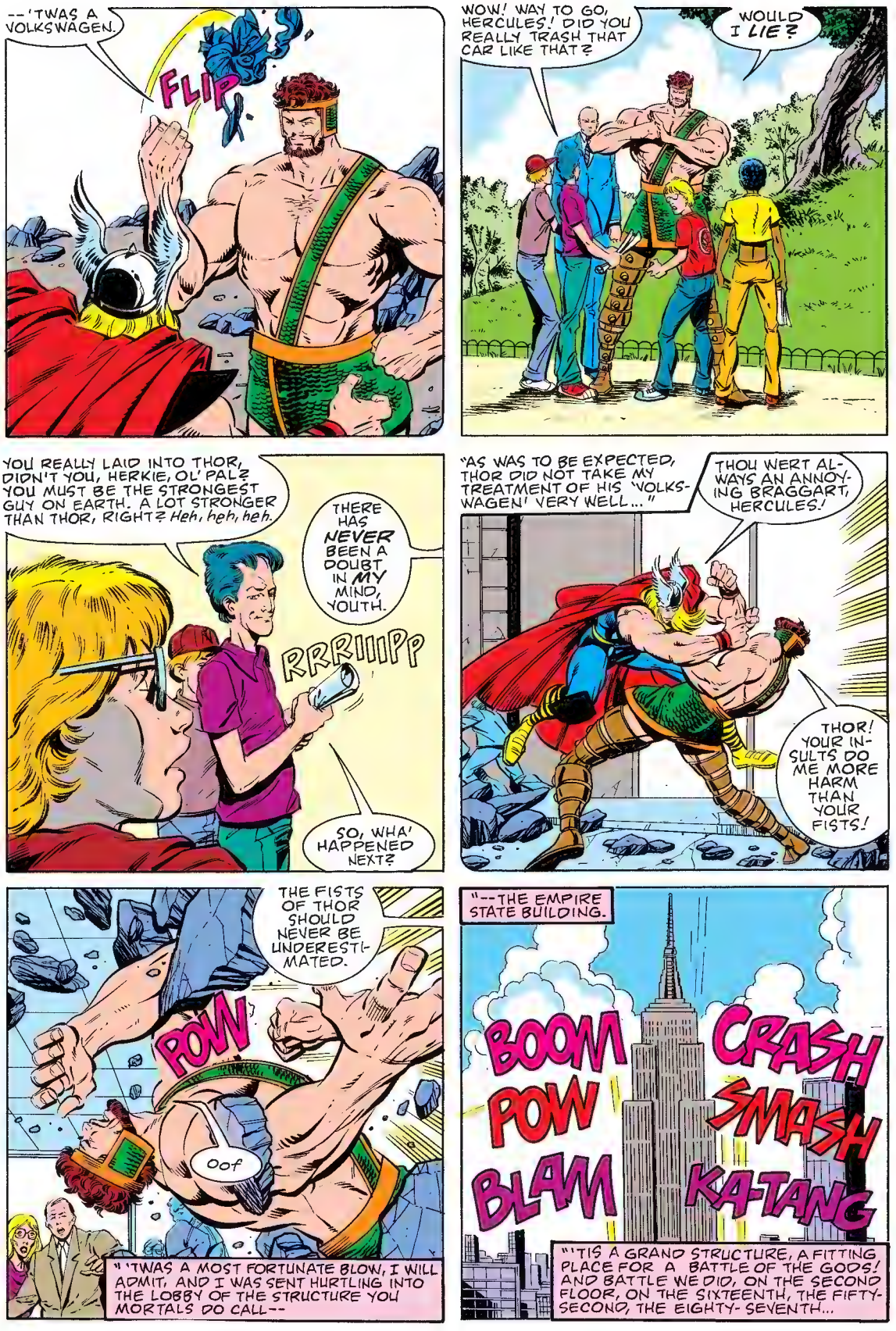

"NOW, WHERE WAS I? OH, YES... NEEDLESS TO SAY, OUR CONTEST OF STRENGTH WAS OVER ERE IT TRULY BEGAN.
THIS HAS BEEN MOST INTERESTING, THOR, BUT I MUST BE OFF, FOR I AM TO ESCORT A LOVELY MAIDEN TO DINNER!
"AS ALWAYS, THERE WAS NO DOUBT AS TO ITS OUTCOME."
"THOR, ALAS, DID NOT TAKE THIS LAST DEFEAT WELL..."
AGAIN YOU WIN! AGAIN AND AGAIN YOU BEST ME! WHY, WHY?
WHAT CAN I SAY, ASGARDIAN? SOMEONE HAS TO BE SECOND BEST.
BONK
BUT WHY MUST IT BE ME!??
Urk?
"NOW, CHILD, YOU MUST UNDERSTAND, NORMALLY I AM THE MOST EVEN-TEMPERED OF GODS, AND I DETEST MINDLESS VIOLENCE..."
WHAT DID I DO?
"... BUT TO BE SAVAGELY AND RUDELY HIT OVER THE HEAD WITH A WEAPON AS RIDICULOUS AS THE URU HAMMER OF ALL THINGS IS TOO MUCH TO ASK EVEN OF THE SON OF ZEUS!"
THOR! THOU HAST MADE ME MAD!
Whimper
SMASH

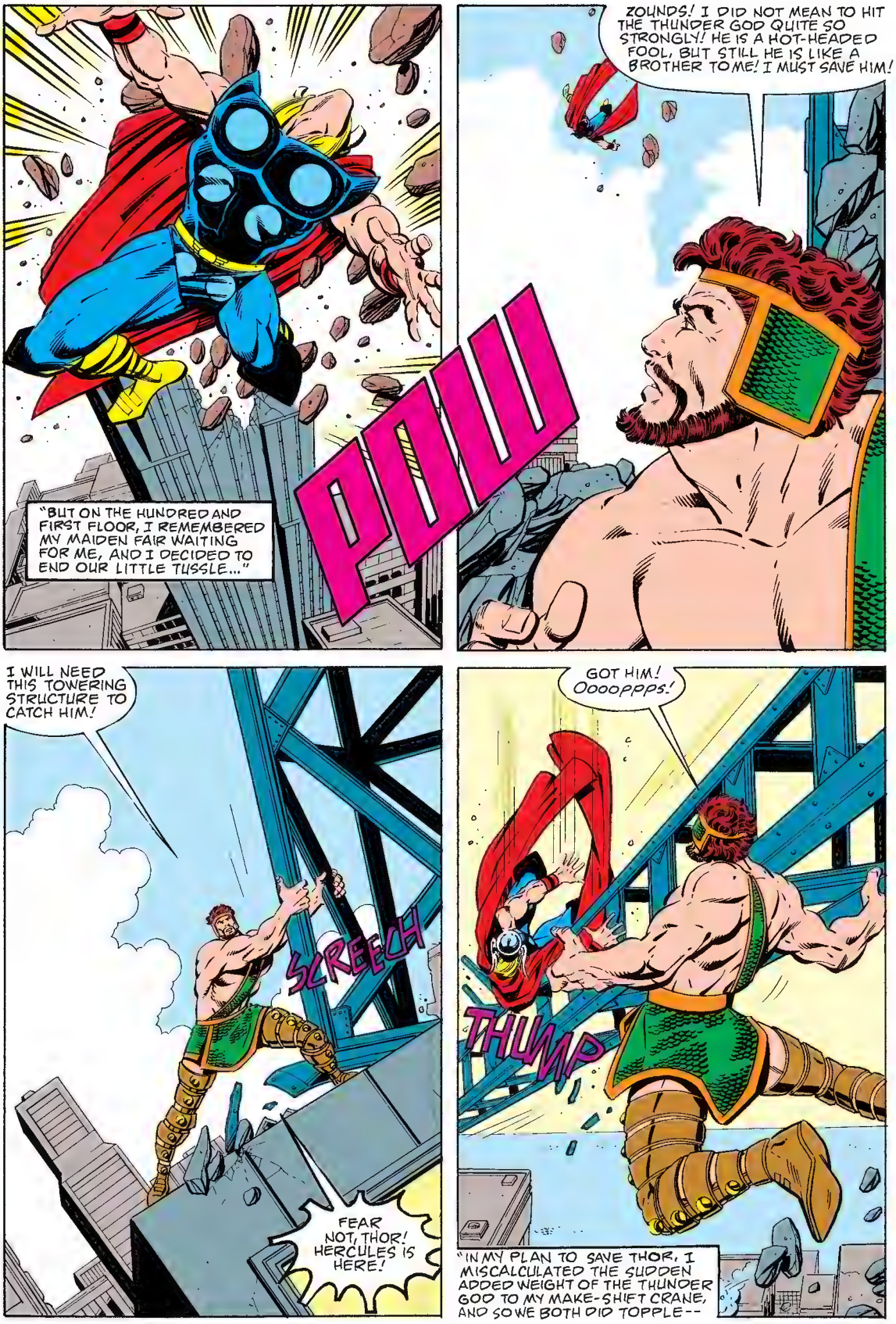

WHAT A PREDICAMENT! I HAVE MADE THE MOST GRIEVEOUS OF ERRORS... I HAVE ANGERED HERCULES!
I MUST DEFEND MYSELF! BUT HOW? EASIER BY FAR IS IT TO DEFEAT THE COMBINED MIGHT OF SURTUR THE FIRE DEMON AND FAFNIR THE DRAGON THAN TO BATTLE THE PRINCE OF POWER! I THINK I AM GOING TO REGRET GETTING OUT OF BED THIS MORNING!
WHERE ARE YOU, SON OF ODIN? ARE YOU HIDING, YOU MOST SORE OF SORE LOSERS? IT IS WELL YOU SHOULD, FOR YOU SHALL NOT ESCAPE THE WRATH OF HERCULES!!
OHO, THERE YOU ARE, BLACKGUARD!
STAND BACK, HERCULES! I KNOW HOW YOU GET WHEN THE BLOOD RAGE O'ERTAKES YOU. I WILL NOT BE RESPONSIBLE IF I MUST TAKE ACTION AGAINST YOU! I WILL DEFEND MYSELF!
CREAK
RRRHIIPPP
DEFEND YOURSELF? FOOLISH THUNDER GOD--
WHAM
--YOU WILL HAVE TO DO MUCH BETTER THAN THIS!
OOFFF!


'TWAS AN INGENIOUS PLAN TO USE MY OPPONENT'S WEAPON AGAINST HIM...
...BUT THEN THE SON OF ZEUS HAS ALWAYS BEEN KNOWN FOR HIS QUICK THINKING.
NOW, MASTER HERCULES, REALLY! THOR ACTING LIKE A SPOILED CHILD? HITTING YOU OVER THE HEAD WITH HIS HAMMER? ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE NOT MAKING--
Heh, heh, JARVIS, TRULY YOU ARE A PRINCE AMONG BUTLERS, BUT YOU LEAVE SOMETHING TO BE DESIRED AS AN AUDIENCE!
NOW, NO MORE INTERRUPTIONS! IT IS QUITE DISTURBING TO THE CHILDREN-- ESPECIALLY THIS YOUNG LAD, MATTHEW, WHO MOST OBVIOUSLY IS AN ADMIRER OF MINE!
BUT, SIR, NONE OF IT IS... OH, VERY WELL, IF YOU INSIST.
"I BEG YOUR PARDONS, YOUNG MORTALS, BUT MY COMPANION IS A MOST EXCITABLE MAN. NOW BACK TO MY TALE: THE BATTLE WAS NOW TRULY ENGAGED, AND THOR WAS FINALLY PROVIDING ME WITH SOME SPORT. NOT MUCH, OF COURSE, BUT SOME."
YOU MAY BE THE MOST POWERFUL BEING IN THE UNIVERSE, HERCULES, BUT DO NOT EXPECT THE SON OF ODIN TO GIVE UP WITHOUT A FIGHT!
BAM
A FIGHT? DO NOT MAKE ME LAUGH, ASGARDIAN!
THERE ARE BABES IN OLYMPUS WHO WOULD GIVE ME MORE TROUBLE TO SUBDUE THAN YOU!
SMASH
KER RASH

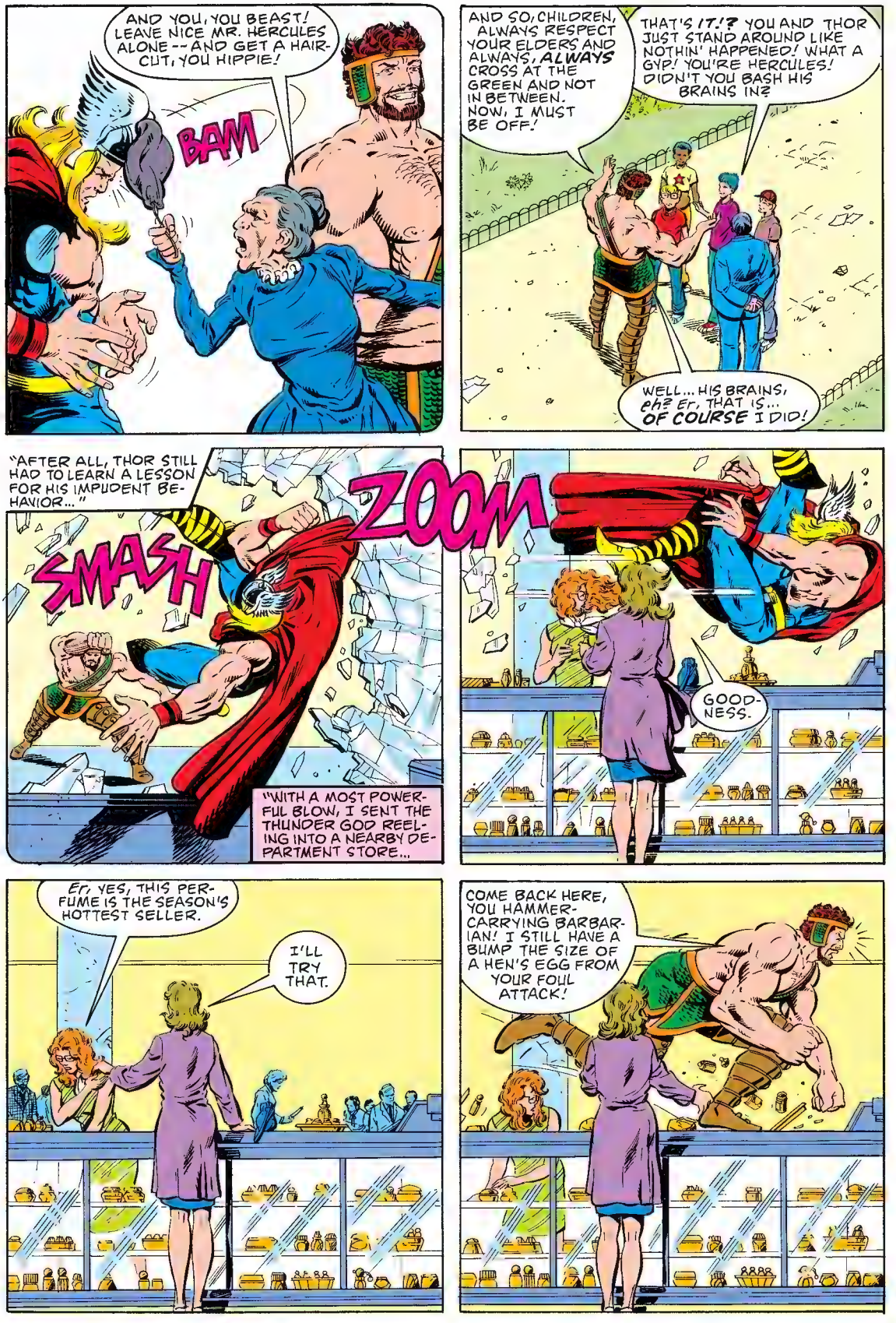

BUT THEN, YOU BEHAVE MUCH LIKE A CHILD, DO YOU NOT, ASGARDIAN?
KA-BLAM
MORE INSULTS, OLYMPIAN? WAS IT NOT ENOUGH THAT I CAME TO YOU IN DESPAIR AND THAT YOU FOUND IT NECESSARY TO HUMBLE ME AGAIN?
I TELL YOU I AM WEARY OF HEARING OF THE GREATNESS OF HERCULES!
WHEN WILL THE POWER OF THOR BE RECOGNIZED? THE POWER THAT CAN DO-- THIS!
387
THOR, YOUR DESTRUCTION OF CITY PROPERTY IS TRULY DISGRACEFUL.
RRRIIIPPP
I MUST PUT A STOP TO IT, DO YOU UNDERSTAND?
NO! WILL NOTHING STOP YOU?
"POOR THOR! TRULY HE DID FEEL MOST INFERIOR IN COMPARISON TO ME, BUT THEN, WHO WOULD NOT?"


I HAVE DECIDED TO END THIS ANNOYING LITTLE BATTLE, THOR, FOR MY DATE IS WAITING!
HE PLANS TO BURY ME UNDER THAT BUS! THERE IS NO TIME TO GET AWAY!
THUS, I MUST USE MIGHTY MJOLNIR TO DESTROY THE VEHICLE!
AND NOW, HERCULES WILL DISCOVER THAT TWO CAN PLAY AT HIS GAME!
SKRASH
OHO, THOR! SURELY YOU DO NOT INTEND TO STOP ME WITH THAT PUNY CAR!
=Ooof= 'TIS NOT JUST A CAR, HERCULES--
SWWOOSH
--'TIS A VOLKSWAGEN!
CORRECTION, THUNDER GOD--
KER-RUNCH


--'TWAS A VOLKSWAGEN.
FLIP
WOW! WAY TO GO, HERCULES! DID YOU REALLY TRASH THAT CAR LIKE THAT?
WOULD I LIE?
YOU REALLY LAID INTO THOR, DIDN'T YOU, HERKIE, OL' PAL? YOU MUST BE THE STRONGEST GUY ON EARTH. A LOT STRONGER THAN THOR, RIGHT? Heh, heh, heh.
THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A DOUBT IN MY MIND, YOUTH.
RRRIIIPP
SO, WHA' HAPPENED NEXT?
"AS WAS TO BE EXPECTED, THOR DID NOT TAKE MY TREATMENT OF HIS 'VOLKSWAGEN' VERY WELL..."
THOU WERT ALWAYS AN ANNOYING BRAGGART, HERCULES!
THOR! YOUR INSULTS DO ME MORE HARM THAN YOUR FISTS!
THE FISTS OF THOR SHOULD NEVER BE UNDERESTIMATED.
POW
oof
"'TWAS A MOST FORTUNATE BLOW, I WILL ADMIT, AND I WAS SENT HURTLING INTO THE LOBBY OF THE STRUCTURE YOU MORTALS DO CALL--
"--THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING.
BOOM
POW
BLAM
CRASH
SMASH
KA-TANG
"'TIS A GRAND STRUCTURE, A FITTING PLACE FOR A BATTLE OF THE GODS! AND BATTLE WE DID, ON THE SECOND FLOOR, ON THE SIXTEENTH, THE FIFTY-SECOND, THE EIGHTY-SEVENTH...

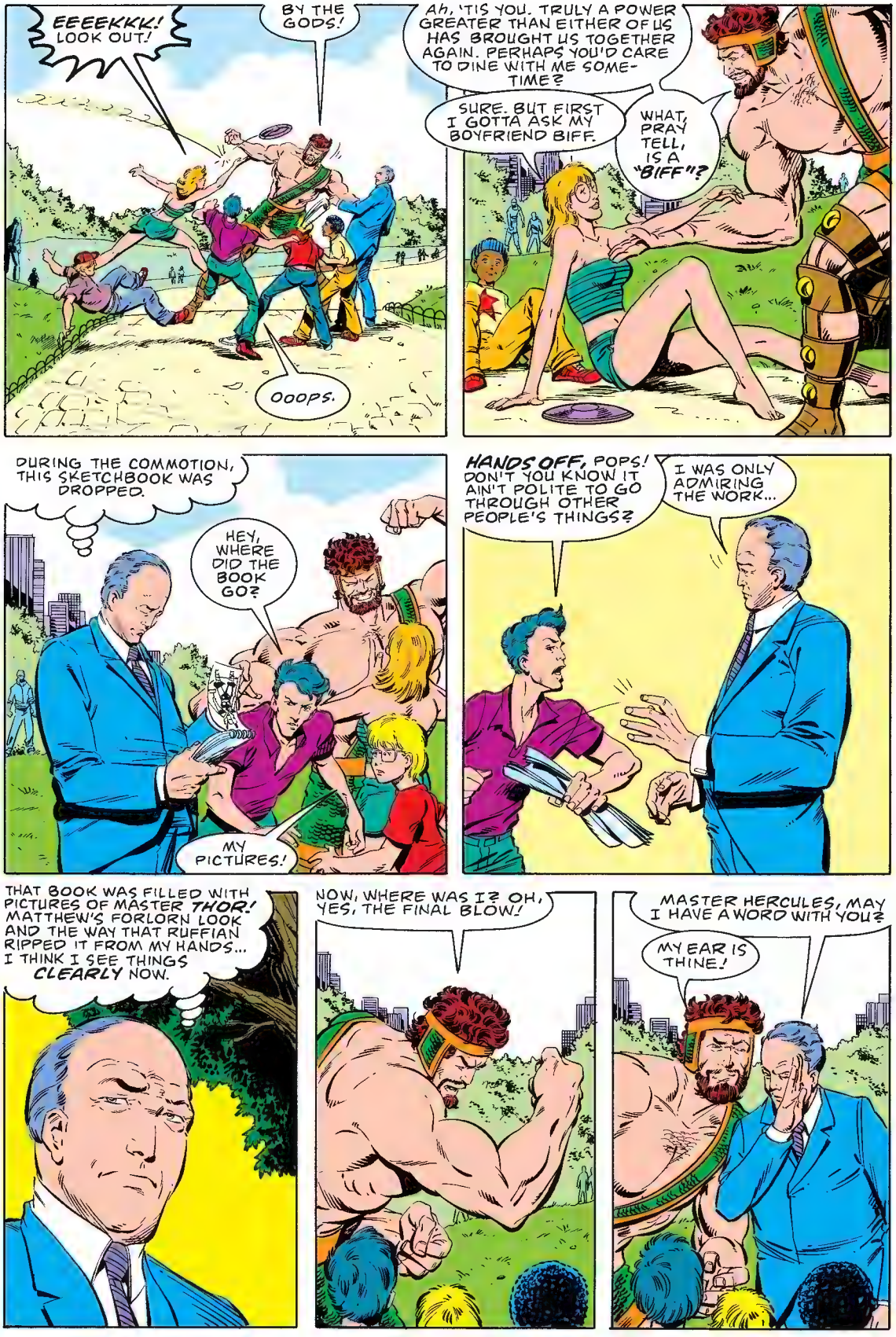

"BUT ON THE HUNDRED AND FIRST FLOOR, I REMEMBERED MY MAIDEN FAIR WAITING FOR ME, AND I DECIDED TO END OUR LITTLE TUSSLE..."
POW
ZOUNDS! I DID NOT MEAN TO HIT THE THUNDER GOD QUITE SO STRONGLY! HE IS A HOT-HEADED FOOL, BUT STILL HE IS LIKE A BROTHER TO ME! I MUST SAVE HIM!
I WILL NEED THIS TOWERING STRUCTURE TO CATCH HIM!
SCREECH
FEAR NOT, THOR! HERCULES IS HERE!
GOT HIM! Oooppps!
THUMP
"IN MY PLAN TO SAVE THOR, I MISCALCULATED THE SUDDEN ADDED WEIGHT OF THE THUNDER GOD TO MY MAKE-SHIFT CRANE, AND SO WE BOTH DID TOPPLE--

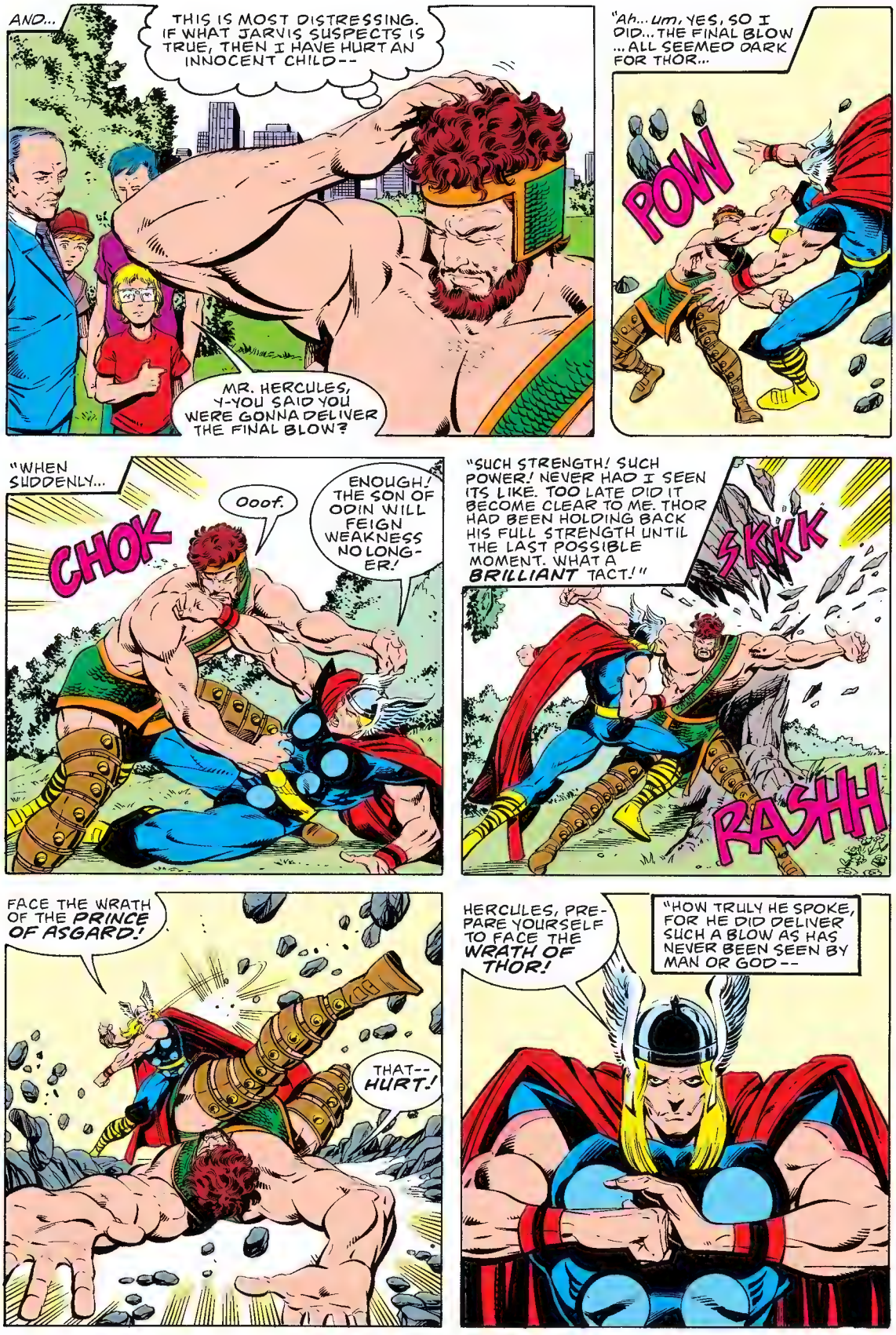
"--TO THE GROUND."
BAM
"Uh, MR. HERCULES, HOWCUM I NEVER SAW NUTHIN' ABOUT THE RADIO TOWER FALLIN' OFF THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING ON THE NEWS OR ANYTHIN'? I MEAN, SOMETHIN' LIKE THAT WOULD BE IN ALL THE PAPERS, WOULDN'T IT?"
"IT WOULD? WELL-- THERE WAS NOT TIME! FOR THE MIGHTY AVENGERS, OF WHOM I AM THE MIGHTIEST, DID REPAIR THE TOWER THE VERY NEXT DAY!
"NOW, BACK TO MY STORY..."
IN TRUTH, I MUST ADMIT I HAVE NOT HAD THIS MUCH FUN SINCE I BATTLED THE QUEEN OF THE AMAZONS!
Ooooh!
THERE IS NOTHING LIKE A GOOD FIGHT TO CLEAR ONE'S HEAD! I AM MY EVEN-TEMPERED SELF AGAIN!
THOR, HOW FARE YOU?
I DO NOT BELIEVE IT! THERE IS NOT A SCRATCH ON YOU! OF ALL THE GODS, WHY ARE THE FATES SO GENEROUS TO YOU?
AS THE MORTALS SAY, JUST LUCKY I--eh?
OH, MR. HERCULES!
WOULD YOU BE SO KIND AS TO HELP A LITTLE OLD LADY ACROSS THE STREET?
HERCULES, I :Oooooff!:
SILENCE, ASGARDIAN! I AM ABOUT TO PERFORM A GOOD DEED!
HOW GALLANT! YOU KNOW, I ALWAYS THOUGHT YOU WERE THE CUTEST ONE OF ALL THOSE SUPER HERO FELLAS.
Ah, I SEE YOU ARE A MOST PERCEPTIVE WOMAN. WATCH YOUR STEP.


AND YOU, YOU BEAST! LEAVE NICE MR. HERCULES ALONE -- AND GET A HAIR-CUT, YOU HIPPIE!
BAM!
AND SO, CHILDREN, ALWAYS RESPECT YOUR ELDERS AND ALWAYS, ALWAYS CROSS AT THE GREEN AND NOT IN BETWEEN. NOW, I MUST BE OFF!
THAT'S IT!? YOU AND THOR JUST STAND AROUND LIKE NOTHIN' HAPPENED! WHAT A GYP! YOU'RE HERCULES! DIDN'T YOU BASH HIS BRAINS IN?
WELL... HIS BRAINS, eh? Er, THAT IS... OF COURSE I DID!
"AFTER ALL, THOR STILL HAD TO LEARN A LESSON FOR HIS IMPUDENT BE-HAVIOR..."
SMASH
ZOOM
"WITH A MOST POWER-FUL BLOW, I SENT THE THUNDER GOD REEL-ING INTO A NEARBY DE-PARTMENT STORE...
GOOD-NESS.
Er, YES, THIS PER-FUME IS THE SEASON'S HOTTEST SELLER.
I'LL TRY THAT.
COME BACK HERE, YOU HAMMER-CARRYING BARBAR-IAN! I STILL HAVE A BUMP THE SIZE OF A HEN'S EGG FROM YOUR FOUL ATTACK!

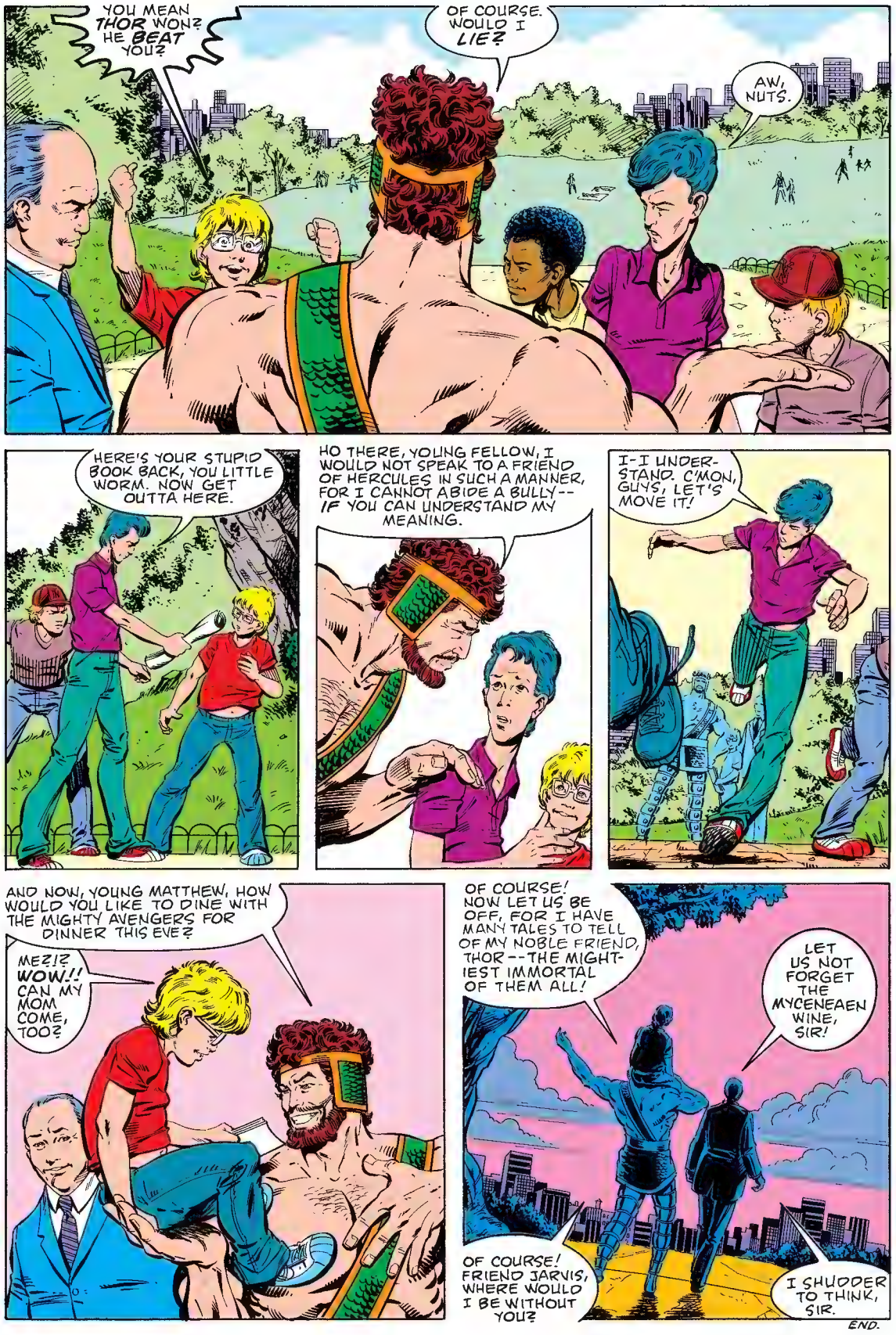
"THUS DID OUR EPIC BATTLE CONTINUE, AS THE IGNOBLE SON OF ODIN AND I COMBATED DOWN THE ENTIRE LENGTH OF THE ISLAND OF MANHATTAN...
"...BUT I DID WEARY OF THIS THANKLESS TASK AND DECIDED TO TEACH THE INSUFFERABLE THUNDER GOD A LESSON HE WOULD NOT SOON FORGET!"
STAND YOU BACK, THOR, FOR NOW THE PRINCE OF POWER PROVES HIS METTLE!
W-WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
"Ah, POOR THOR. HE HAS SUCH LITTLE IMAGINATION, YOU KNOW. I STILL LAUGH WHEN I REMEMBER THE LOOK ON HIS FACE WHEN I RIPPED MANHATTAN ISLAND FROM ITS VERY BED AND DUMPED HIM INTO THE EAST RIVER!
"IT WAS A DEED ONLY THE MIGHTIEST OF THE MIGHTY COULD PERFORM! A DEED OF WHICH THE POETS WILL LONG SING--UNTIL OLYMPUS IS BUT A DISTANT MEMORY AND ASGARD IS NO MORE!"
IMPRESSIVE STORY, WAS IT NOT?
THE ENDING LEAVES ONE A BIT INCREDULOUS, SIR.
I DON'T THINK YOU CAN DO THAT. IT'S IMPOSSIBLE.
YEAH, EVEN I DON'T BELIEVE THAT.
I SEE THAT THIS IS THE AGE OF CYNICISM, JARVIS. WELL, PERHAPS I DID EXAGGERATE A LITTLE BIT.
WELL, SIR, YOU HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO STRETCH THE TRUTH AT TIMES... IF I MAY BE SO BOLD.

"WELL, CHILDREN, WHAT I MEANT TO SAY WAS THAT I WAS ANGRY ENOUGH TO LIFT THE ISLAND FROM ITS ROOTS. IN REALITY, Ahem, MY ANGER FOUND EXPRESSION IN A MORE MUNDANE MANNER.
POW
GEE, THINGS DON'T LOOK GOOD FOR THOR, DO THEY, MATT, OL' BUDDY?
SOUNDS LIKE HE'S GETTIN' BEAT, BUT GOOD!
BEAT? CHILD, NEVER HAS ANY GOD MET SO SOUND A DEFEAT!
"FOR I DID DELIVER BLOW AFTER DEVASTATING BLOW...
"... CLEARLY, THOR WAS DOOMED."
THE CHILD, MATTHEW, SEEMS UPSET. BUT WHY?
"THEN, CAME TIME FOR THE FINAL BLOW! NOTHING COULD SAVE THOR NOW!"
AND THIS OTHER UNRULY-LOOKING LAD SEEMS TO BE ENJOYING HIMSELF IMMENSELY.
RRRIIIPPP


EEEEKKK! LOOK OUT!
BY THE GODS!
OOOPS.
Ah, 'TIS YOU. TRULY A POWER GREATER THAN EITHER OF US HAS BROUGHT US TOGETHER AGAIN. PERHAPS YOU'D CARE TO DINE WITH ME SOMETIME?
SURE. BUT FIRST I GOTTA ASK MY BOYFRIEND BIFF.
WHAT, PRAY TELL, IS A "BIFF"?
DURING THE COMMOTION, THIS SKETCHBOOK WAS DROPPED.
HEY, WHERE DID THE BOOK GO?
MY PICTURES!
HANDS OFF, POPS! DON'T YOU KNOW IT AIN'T POLITE TO GO THROUGH OTHER PEOPLE'S THINGS?
I WAS ONLY ADMIRING THE WORK...
THAT BOOK WAS FILLED WITH PICTURES OF MASTER THOR! MATTHEW'S FORLORN LOOK AND THE WAY THAT RUFFIAN RIPPED IT FROM MY HANDS... I THINK I SEE THINGS CLEARLY NOW.
NOW, WHERE WAS I? OH, YES, THE FINAL BLOW!
MASTER HERCULES, MAY I HAVE A WORD WITH YOU?
MY EAR IS THINE!


AND...
THIS IS MOST DISTRESSING. IF WHAT JARVIS SUSPECTS IS TRUE, THEN I HAVE HURT AN INNOCENT CHILD--
MR. HERCULES, Y-YOU SAID YOU WERE GONNA DELIVER THE FINAL BLOW?
"Ah... um, YES, SO I DID... THE FINAL BLOW ... ALL SEEMED DARK FOR THOR...
POW
"WHEN SUDDENLY...
CHOK
Ooof.
ENOUGH! THE SON OF ODIN WILL FEIGN WEAKNESS NO LONGER!
"SUCH STRENGTH! SUCH POWER! NEVER HAD I SEEN ITS LIKE. TOO LATE DID IT BECOME CLEAR TO ME. THOR HAD BEEN HOLDING BACK HIS FULL STRENGTH UNTIL THE LAST POSSIBLE MOMENT. WHAT A BRILLIANT TACT!"
SKKK
RASHH
FACE THE WRATH OF THE PRINCE OF ASGARD!
THAT-- HURT!
HERCULES, PREPARE YOURSELF TO FACE THE WRATH OF THOR!
"HOW TRULY HE SPOKE, FOR HE DID DELIVER SUCH A BLOW AS HAS NEVER BEEN SEEN BY MAN OR GOD--

"I LANDED IN A PLACE THE GODS FORGOT--NEW JERSEY!"


YOU MEAN THOR WON? HE BEAT YOU?
OF COURSE. WOULD I LIE?
AW, NUTS.
HERE'S YOUR STUPID BOOK BACK, YOU LITTLE WORM. NOW GET OUTTA HERE.
HO THERE, YOUNG FELLOW, I WOULD NOT SPEAK TO A FRIEND OF HERCULES IN SUCH A MANNER, FOR I CANNOT ABIDE A BULLY-- IF YOU CAN UNDERSTAND MY MEANING.
I-I UNDERSTAND. C'MON, GUYS, LET'S MOVE IT!
AND NOW, YOUNG MATTHEW, HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO DINE WITH THE MIGHTY AVENGERS FOR DINNER THIS EVE?
ME?! WOW!! CAN MY MOM COME, TOO?
OF COURSE! NOW LET US BE OFF, FOR I HAVE MANY TALES TO TELL OF MY NOBLE FRIEND, THOR--THE MIGHTIEST IMMORTAL OF THEM ALL!
LET US NOT FORGET THE MYCENEAEN WINE, SIR!
OF COURSE! FRIEND JARVIS, WHERE WOULD I BE WITHOUT YOU?
I SHUDDER TO THINK, SIR.
END.

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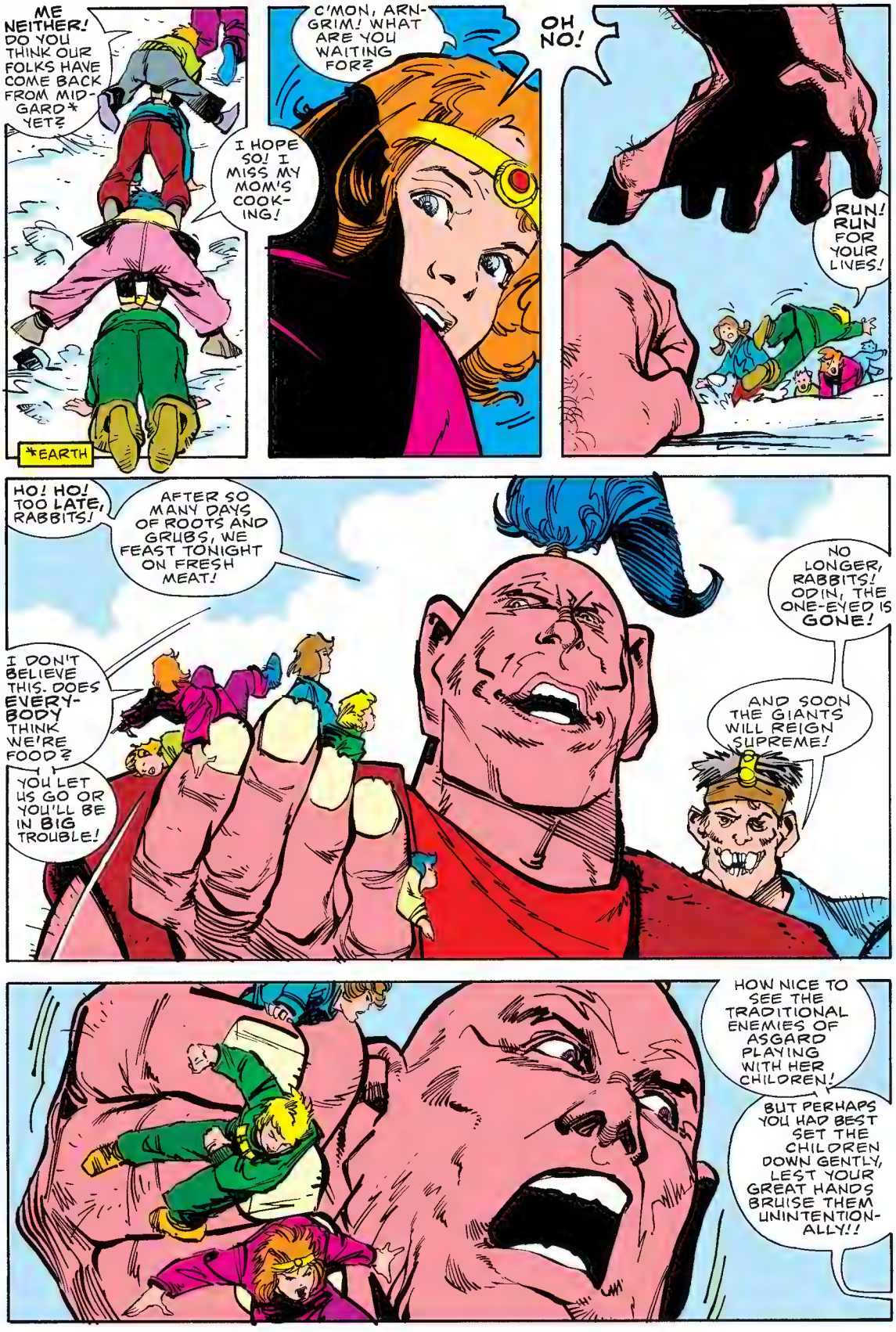
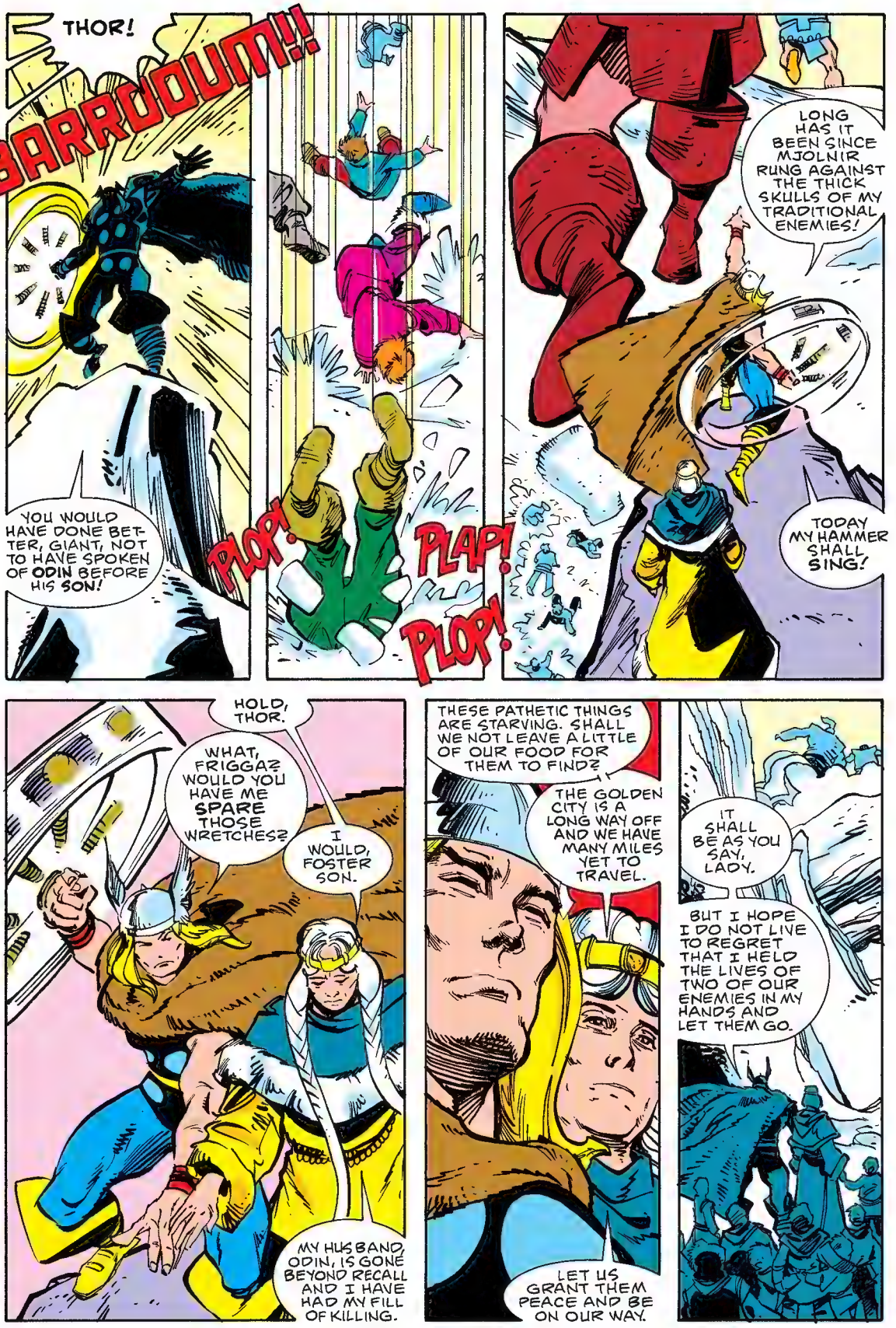
the mighty
THOR
...and Beta Ray Bill, too!

STAN LEE PRESENTS: the MIGHTY THOR®

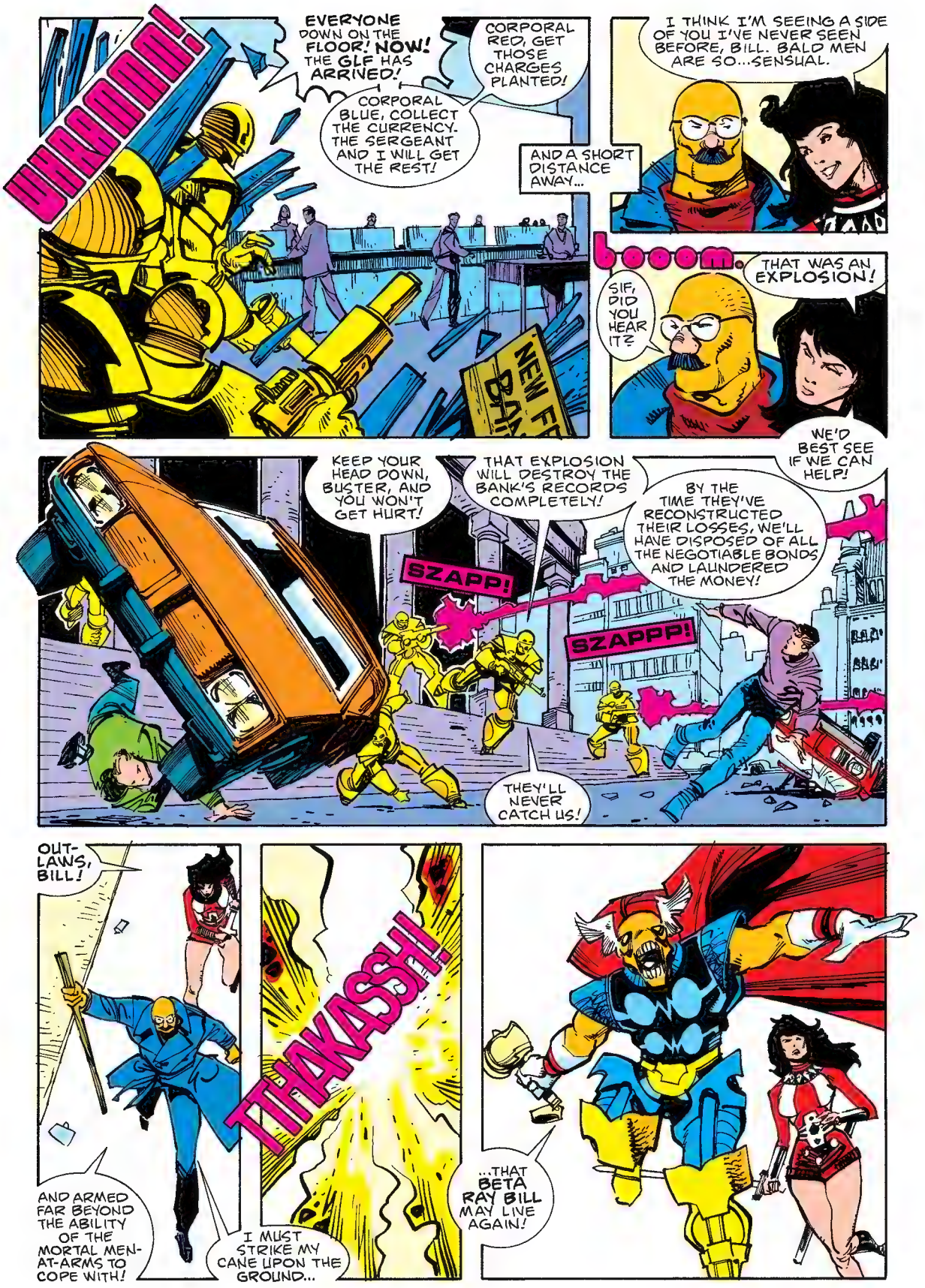
A NEW DEAL FROM AN OLD DECK OR THE CREDIT CARD SOLDIERS
IN THE FAR REACHES OF ASGARD, THE CHILDREN OF THE GODS DASH THROUGH THE SNOW...
...AS THE FROST GIANTS, ENEMIES OF THE GODS, WATCH WITH HUNGRY EYES.
BOY, I CAN'T WAIT TO GET HOME!

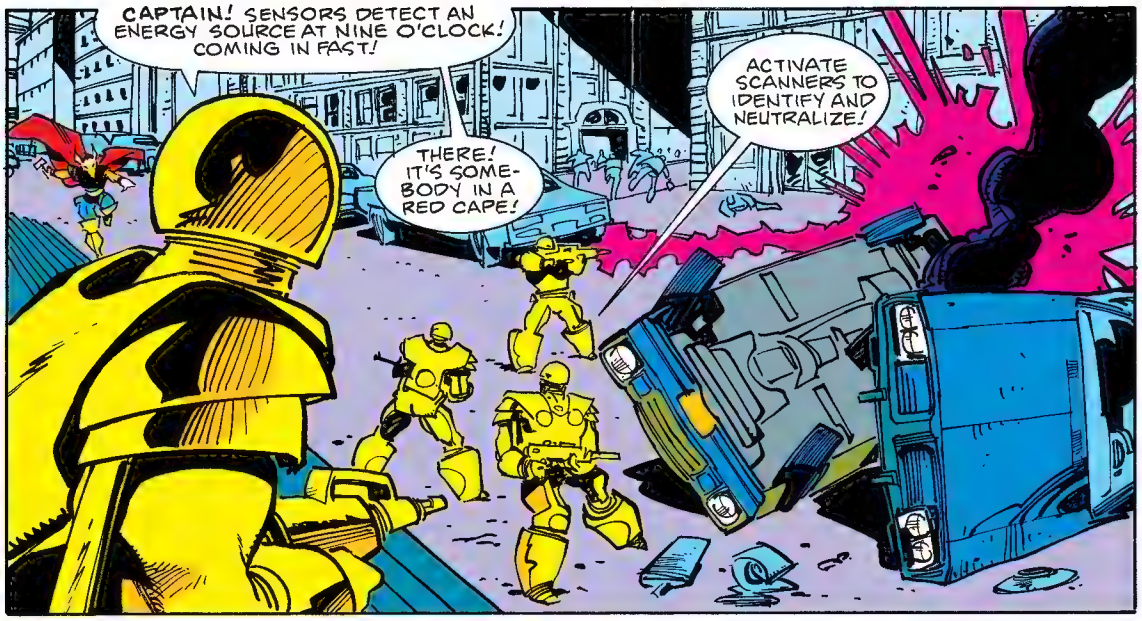

ME NEITHER! DO YOU THINK OUR FOLKS HAVE COME BACK FROM MIDGARD* YET?
I HOPE SO! I MISS MY MOM'S COOKING!
*EARTH
C'MON, ARNGRIM! WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?
OH NO!
RUN! RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!
HO! HO! TOO LATE, RABBITS!
AFTER SO MANY DAYS OF ROOTS AND GRUBS, WE FEAST TONIGHT ON FRESH MEAT!
I DON'T BELIEVE THIS. DOES EVERYBODY THINK WE'RE FOOD?
YOU LET US GO OR YOU'LL BE IN BIG TROUBLE!
NO LONGER, RABBITS! ODIN, THE ONE-EYED IS GONE!
AND SOON THE GIANTS WILL REIGN SUPREME!
HOW NICE TO SEE THE TRADITIONAL ENEMIES OF ASGARD PLAYING WITH HER CHILDREN!
BUT PERHAPS YOU HAD BEST SET THE CHILDREN DOWN GENTLY, LEST YOUR GREAT HANDS BRUISE THEM UNINTENTIONALLY!!

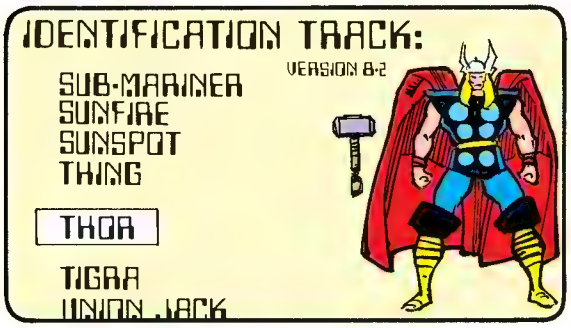

THOR!
BARROOUM!!
YOU WOULD HAVE DONE BETTER, GIANT, NOT TO HAVE SPOKEN OF ODIN BEFORE HIS SON!
PLOP!
PLAP!
PLOP!
LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE MJOLNIR RUNG AGAINST THE THICK SKULLS OF MY TRADITIONAL ENEMIES!
TODAY MY HAMMER SHALL SING!
HOLD, THOR.
WHAT, FRIGGA? WOULD YOU HAVE ME SPARE THOSE WRETCHES?
I WOULD, FOSTER SON.
MY HUSBAND, ODIN, IS GONE BEYOND RECALL AND I HAVE HAD MY FILL OF KILLING.
THESE PATHETIC THINGS ARE STARVING. SHALL WE NOT LEAVE A LITTLE OF OUR FOOD FOR THEM TO FIND?
THE GOLDEN CITY IS A LONG WAY OFF AND WE HAVE MANY MILES YET TO TRAVEL.
LET US GRANT THEM PEACE AND BE ON OUR WAY.
IT SHALL BE AS YOU SAY, LADY.
BUT I HOPE I DO NOT LIVE TO REGRET THAT I HELD THE LIVES OF TWO OF OUR ENEMIES IN MY HANDS AND LET THEM GO.

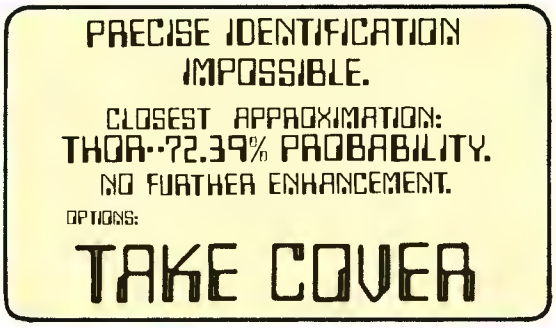
BUT AS THOR WONDERS WHETHER OR NOT HE HAS DONE THE RIGHT THING, WE TURN TO DOWN-TOWN MANHATTAN WHERE...
...TWO TOURISTS WANDER THROUGH THE CITY, TAKING IN THE SIGHTS...
... AND DOING A LITTLE SHOPPING.
BILL, LOOK!
WHAT IS IT, MILADY SIF?
NOW DON'T BE STUFFY MILORD BETA RAY.
JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE AN ALIEN SPENDING A BRIEF SOJOURN ON EARTH DOESN'T MEAN YOU CAN'T ENJOY YOURSELF.
I HAVE BEEN THE WARRIOR-GUARDIAN OF MY PEOPLE FOR A LONG TIME, SIF.
I HAVE NOT HAD TIME FOR LAUGHTER.
THEN IT'S TIME YOU DID.
AND THESE WOULD BE PERFECT FOR YOU.
I THINK YOU LOOK VERY DISTINGUISHED IN GLASSES.
HMMMM.
I'M NOT AT ALL SURE THAT THIS IS HOW ASGARDIANS OUGHT TO COMPORT THEMSELVES WHEN THEY'RE VISITING A FOREIGN COUNTRY.
YOU'LL LEARN!

MEANWHILE, ONLY A FEW BLOCKS AWAY FROM BILL AND SIF AT THE MAIN OFFICE OF THE NEW FEDERAL BANK OF NEW YORK...
BEEP!
HONK! HONK!
VROOOM! VAROOM!
SCREEECH!
switch!
SKKATHOOM!
TROOPS, DEPLOY ACCORDING TO PLAN!
HIT 'EM HARD AND DON'T STOP FOR ANYTHING!

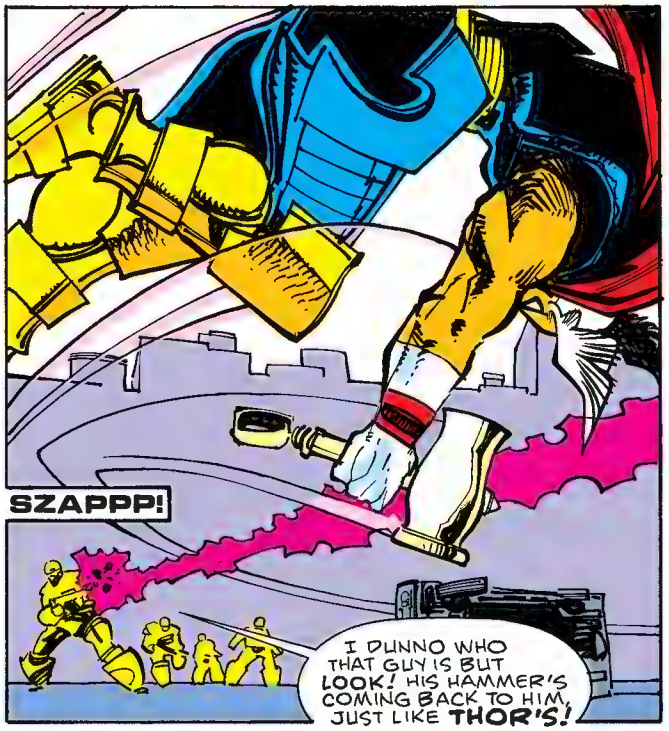

UHRMMM!
EVERYONE DOWN ON THE FLOOR! NOW! THE GLF HAS ARRIVED!
CORPORAL RED, GET THOSE CHARGES PLANTED!
CORPORAL BLUE, COLLECT THE CURRENCY. THE SERGEANT AND I WILL GET THE REST!
AND A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY...
I THINK I'M SEEING A SIDE OF YOU I'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE, BILL. BALD MEN ARE SO...SENSUAL.
boom.
THAT WAS AN EXPLOSION!
SIF, DID YOU HEAR IT?
KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN, BUSTER, AND YOU WON'T GET HURT!
THAT EXPLOSION WILL DESTROY THE BANK'S RECORDS COMPLETELY!
BY THE TIME THEY'VE RECONSTRUCTED THEIR LOSSES, WE'LL HAVE DISPOSED OF ALL THE NEGOTIABLE BONDS AND LAUNDERED THE MONEY!
WE'D BEST SEE IF WE CAN HELP!
SZAPP!
SZAPPP!
THEY'LL NEVER CATCH US!
OUT-LAWS, BILL!
AND ARMED FAR BEYOND THE ABILITY OF THE MORTAL MEN-AT-ARMS TO COPE WITH!
I MUST STRIKE MY CANE UPON THE GROUND...
TTHAKASSH!
...THAT BETA RAY BILL MAY LIVE AGAIN!

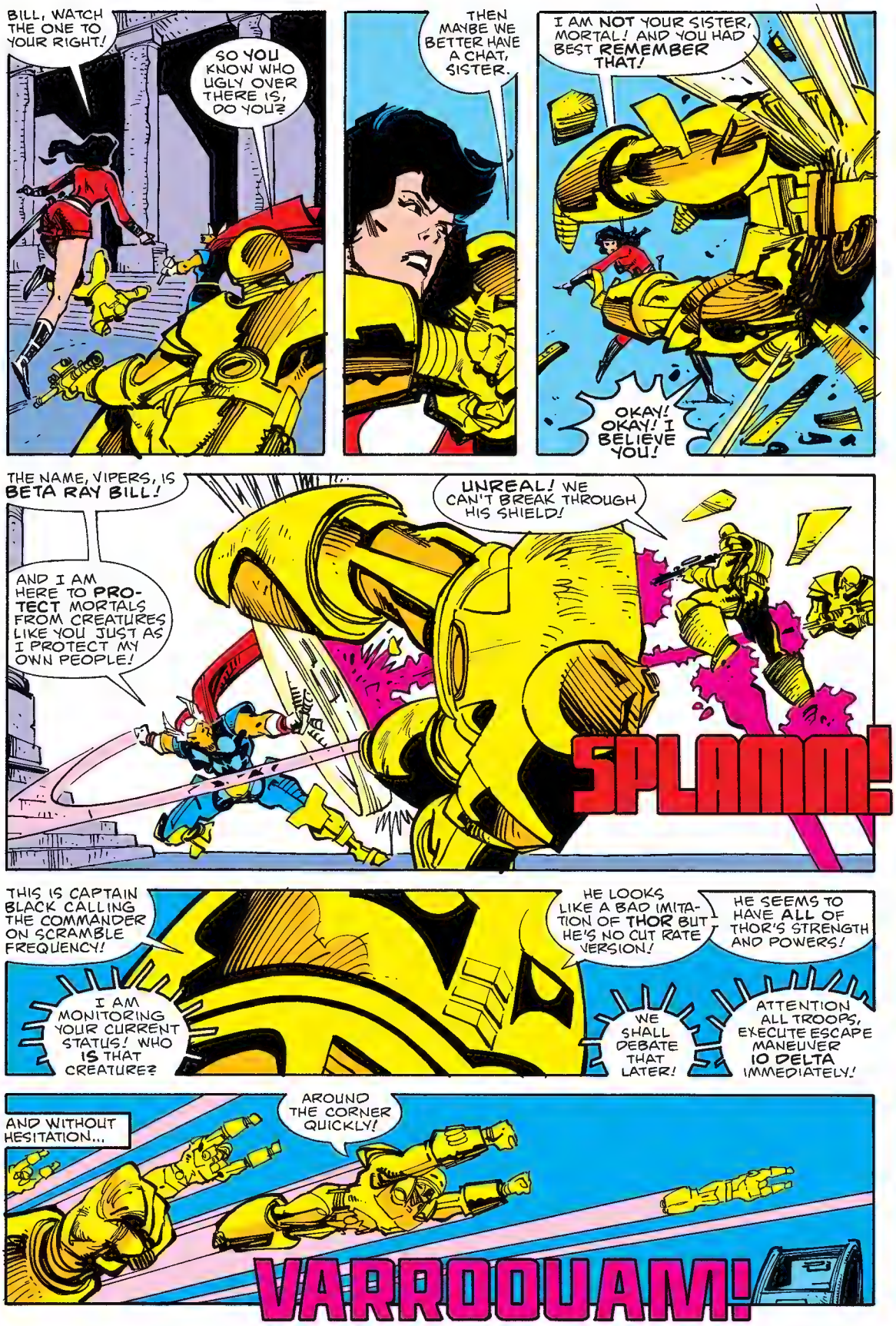

CAPTAIN! SENSORS DETECT AN ENERGY SOURCE AT NINE O'CLOCK! COMING IN FAST!
THERE! IT'S SOMEBODY IN A RED CAPE!
ACTIVATE SCANNERS TO IDENTIFY AND NEUTRALIZE!

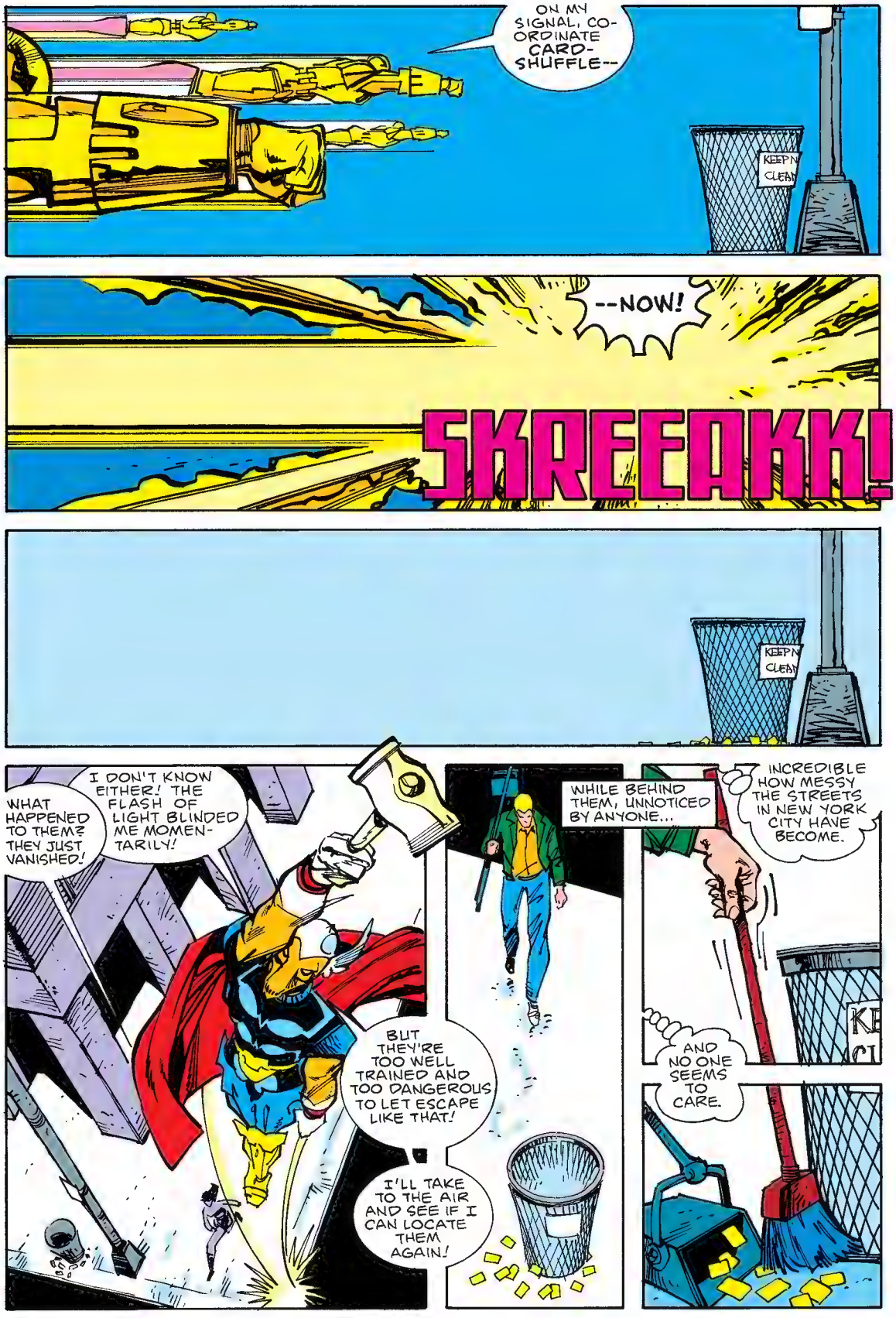

IDENTIFICATION TRACK:
VERSION 8-2
SUB-MARINER
SUNFIRE
SUNSPOT
THING
THOR
TIGRA
UNION JACK

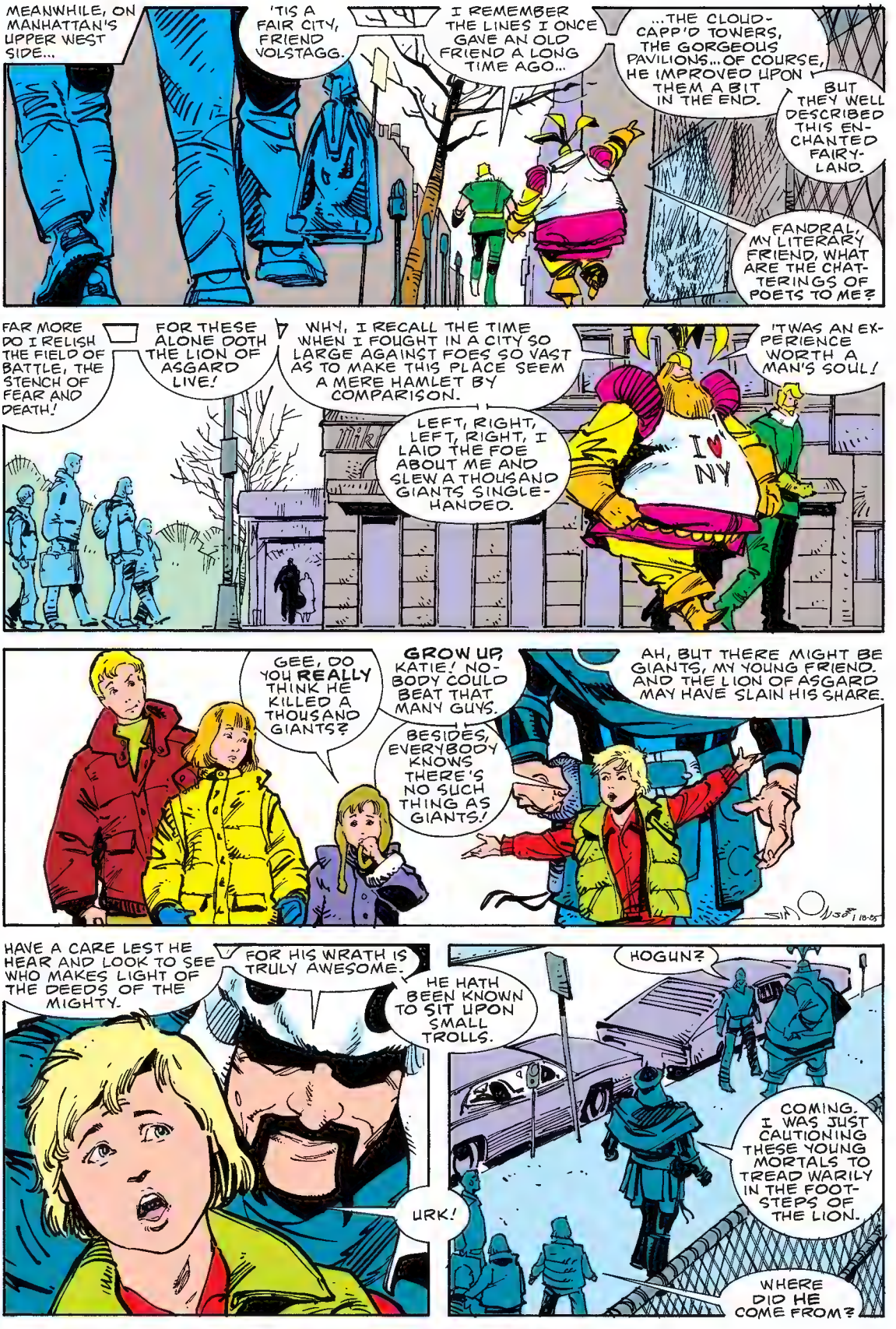

PRECISE IDENTIFICATION IMPOSSIBLE.
CLOSEST APPROXIMATION:
THOR--72.39% PROBABILITY.
NO FURTHER ENHANCEMENT.
OPTIONS:
TAKE COVER

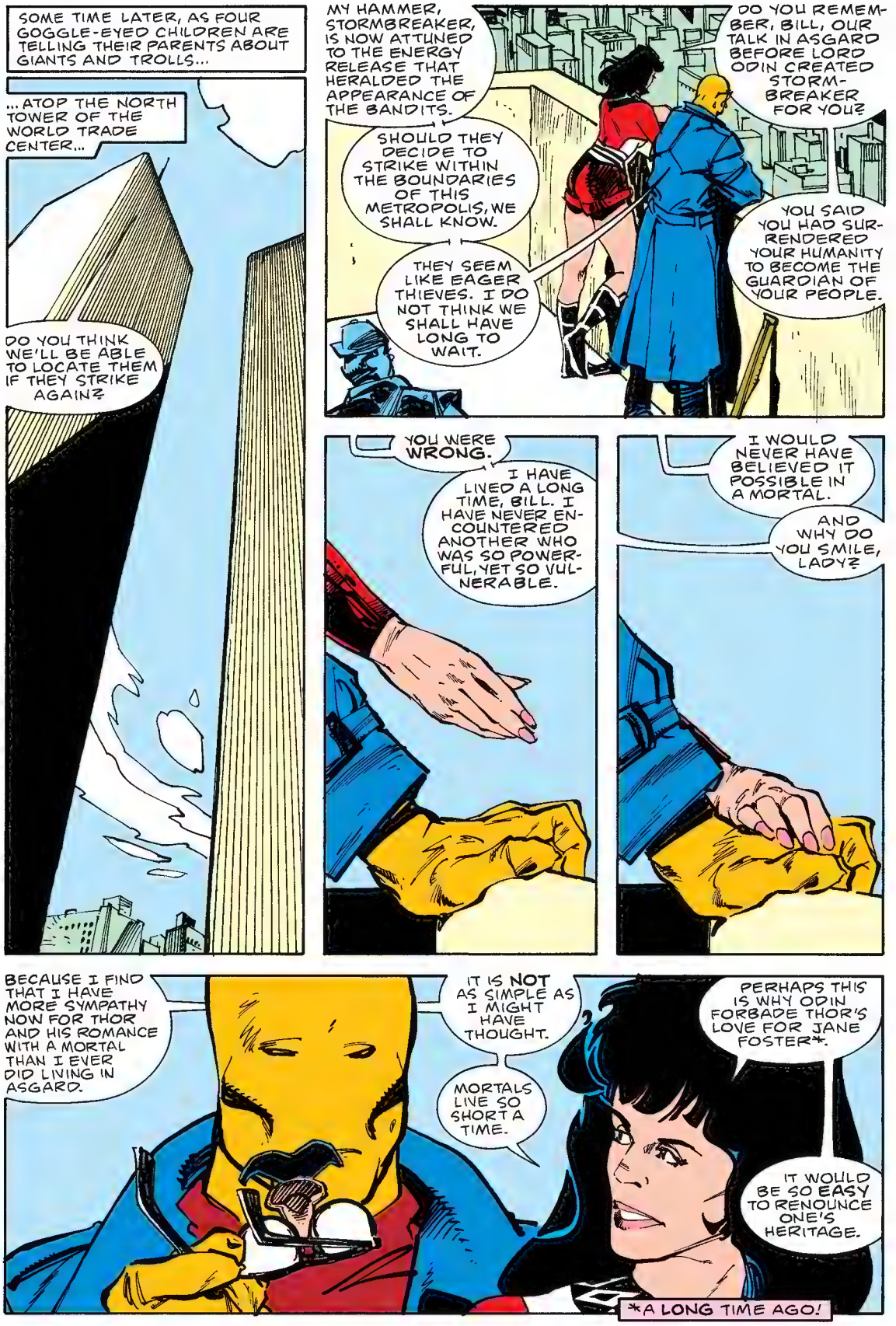
KRAASSCH!

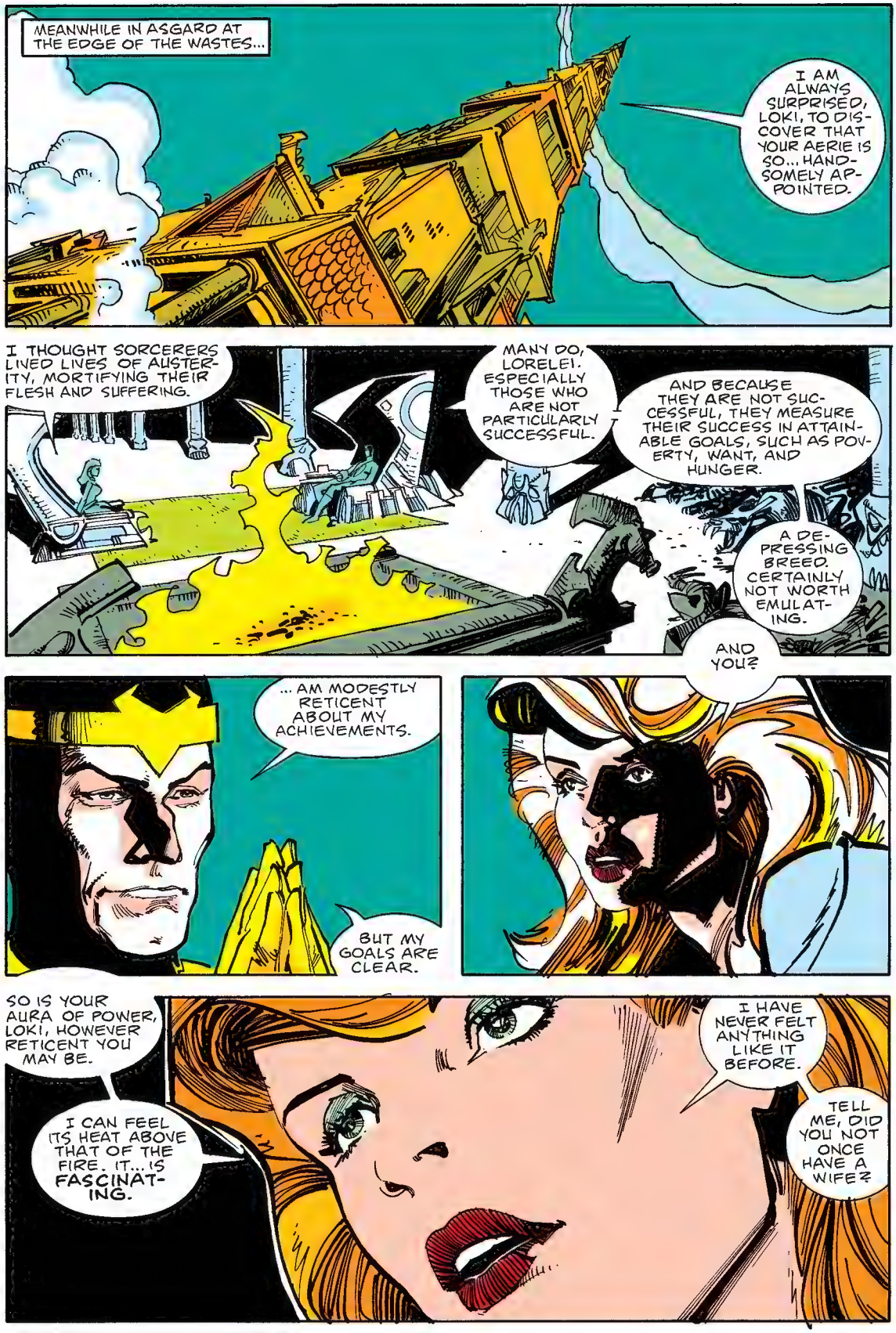

SZAPPP!
I DUNNO WHO THAT GUY IS BUT LOOK! HIS HAMMER'S COMING BACK TO HIM, JUST LIKE THOR'S!

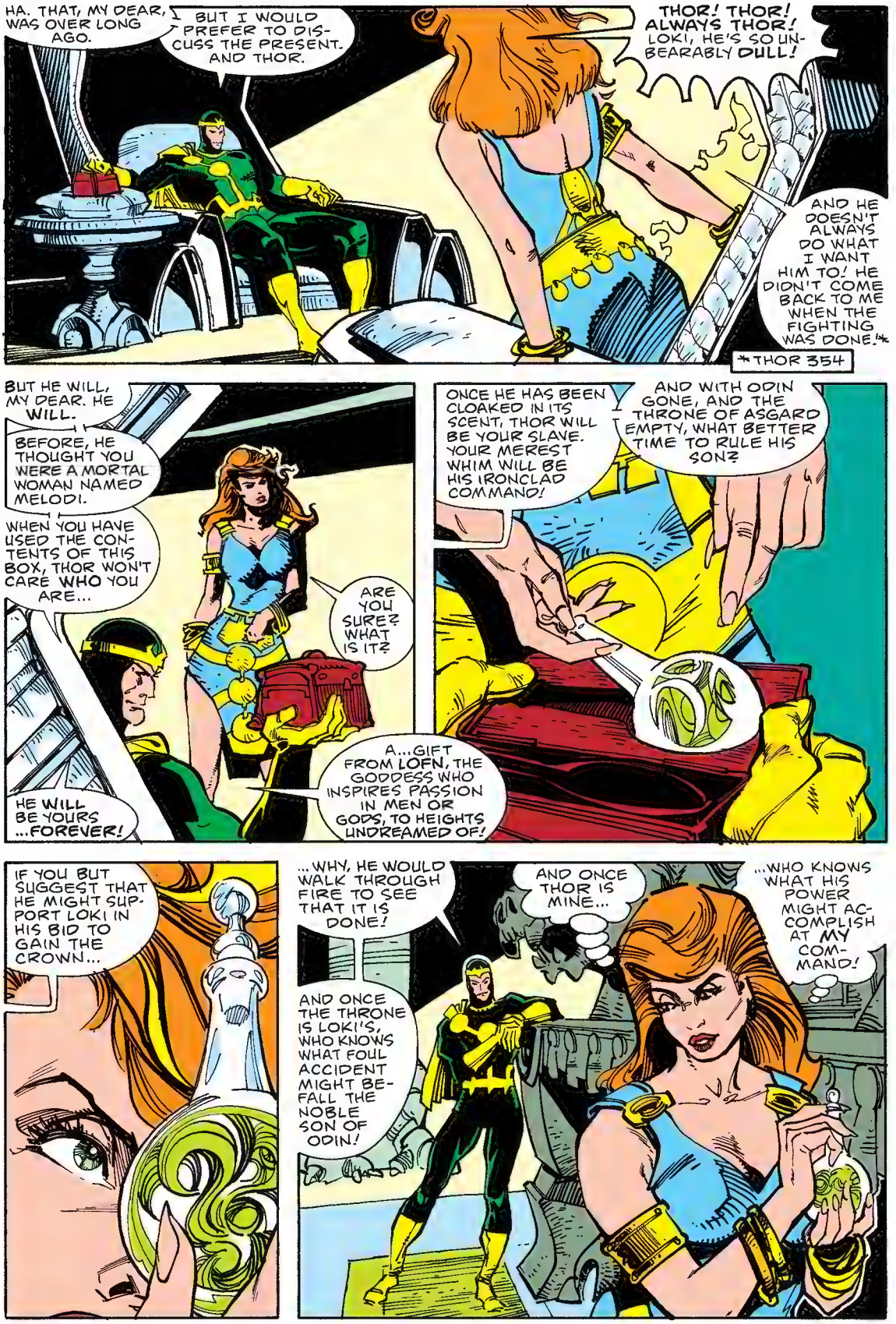

BILL, WATCH THE ONE TO YOUR RIGHT!
SO YOU KNOW WHO UGLY OVER THERE IS, DO YOU?
THEN MAYBE WE BETTER HAVE A CHAT, SISTER.
I AM NOT YOUR SISTER, MORTAL! AND YOU HAD BEST REMEMBER THAT!
OKAY! OKAY! I BELIEVE YOU!
THE NAME, VIPERS, IS BETA RAY BILL!
AND I AM HERE TO PRO-TECT MORTALS FROM CREATURES LIKE YOU JUST AS I PROTECT MY OWN PEOPLE!
UNREAL! WE CAN'T BREAK THROUGH HIS SHIELD!
SPLAMM!
THIS IS CAPTAIN BLACK CALLING THE COMMANDER ON SCRAMBLE FREQUENCY!
I AM MONITORING YOUR CURRENT STATUS! WHO IS THAT CREATURE?
HE LOOKS LIKE A BAD IMITA-TION OF THOR BUT HE'S NO CUT RATE VERSION!
HE SEEMS TO HAVE ALL OF THOR'S STRENGTH AND POWERS!
WE SHALL DEBATE THAT LATER!
ATTENTION ALL TROOPS, EXECUTE ESCAPE MANEUVER 10 DELTA IMMEDIATELY!
AND WITHOUT HESITATION...
AROUND THE CORNER QUICKLY!
VARROOUAM!

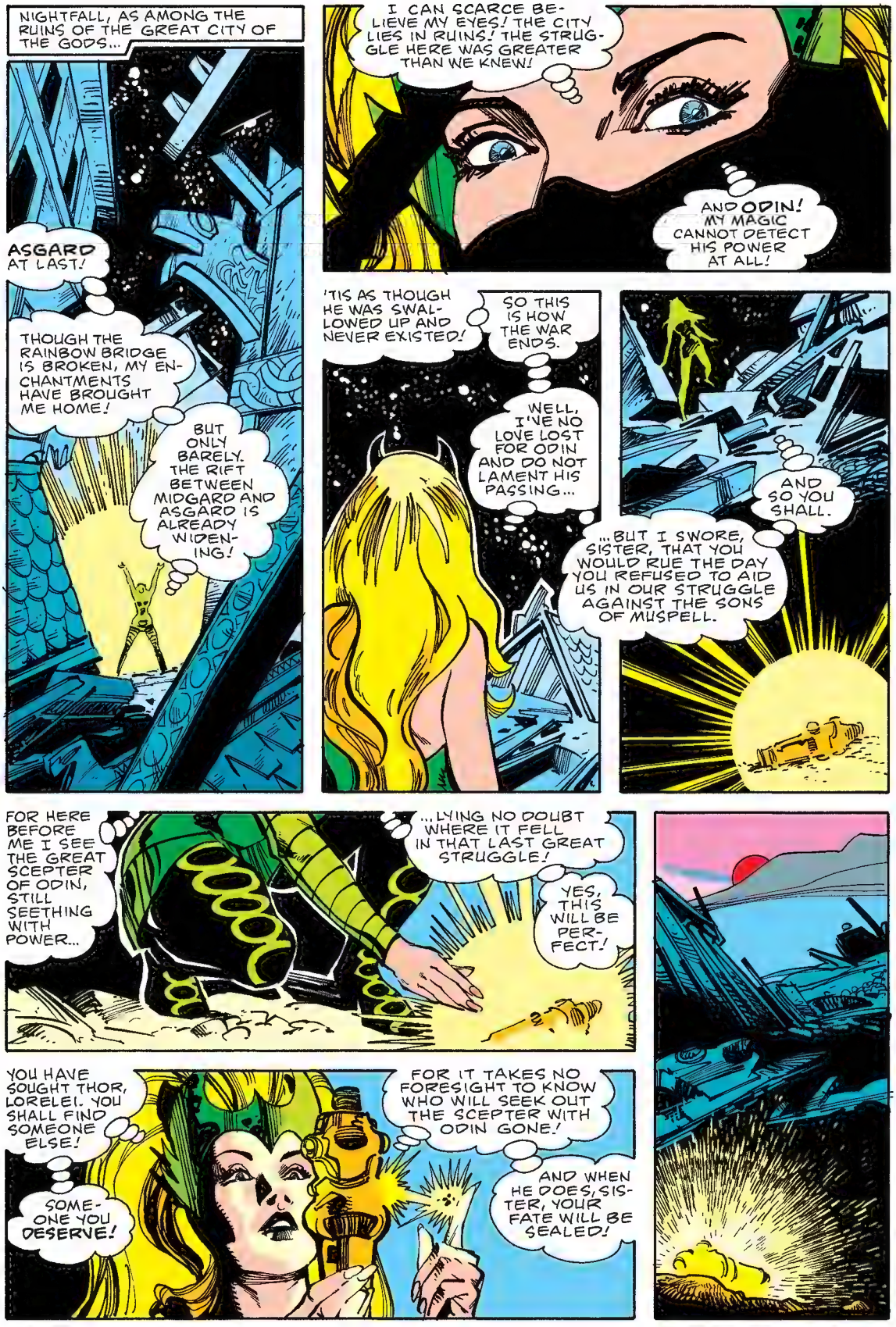

ON MY SIGNAL, CO-ORDINATE CARD-SHUFFLE--
KEEP N CLEAN
--NOW!
SKREEAKK!
KEEP N CLEAN
WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM? THEY JUST VANISHED!
I DON'T KNOW EITHER! THE FLASH OF LIGHT BLINDED ME MOMEN-TARILY!
BUT THEY'RE TOO WELL TRAINED AND TOO DANGEROUS TO LET ESCAPE LIKE THAT!
I'LL TAKE TO THE AIR AND SEE IF I CAN LOCATE THEM AGAIN!
WHILE BEHIND THEM, UNNOTICED BY ANYONE...
INCREDIBLE HOW MESSY THE STREETS IN NEW YORK CITY HAVE BECOME.
AND NO ONE SEEMS TO CARE.


MEANWHILE, ON MANHATTAN'S UPPER WEST SIDE...
'TIS A FAIR CITY, FRIEND VOLSTAGG.
I REMEMBER THE LINES I ONCE GAVE AN OLD FRIEND A LONG TIME AGO...
...THE CLOUD-CAPP'D TOWERS, THE GORGEOUS PAVILIONS... OF COURSE, HE IMPROVED UPON THEM A BIT IN THE END.
BUT THEY WELL DESCRIBED THIS ENCHANTED FAIRY-LAND.
FANDRAL, MY LITERARY FRIEND, WHAT ARE THE CHATTERINGS OF POETS TO ME?
FAR MORE DO I RELISH THE FIELD OF BATTLE, THE STENCH OF FEAR AND DEATH!
FOR THESE ALONE DOTH THE LION OF ASGARD LIVE!
WHY, I RECALL THE TIME WHEN I FOUGHT IN A CITY SO LARGE AGAINST FOES SO VAST AS TO MAKE THIS PLACE SEEM A MERE HAMLET BY COMPARISON.
LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT, RIGHT, I LAID THE FOE ABOUT ME AND SLEW A THOUSAND GIANTS SINGLE-HANDED.
I ♥ NY
'TWAS AN EXPERIENCE WORTH A MAN'S SOUL!
GEE, DO YOU **REALLY** THINK HE KILLED A THOUSAND GIANTS?
GROW UP, KATIE! NOBODY COULD BEAT THAT MANY GUYS.
BESIDES, EVERYBODY KNOWS THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS GIANTS!
AH, BUT THERE MIGHT BE GIANTS, MY YOUNG FRIEND. AND THE LION OF ASGARD MAY HAVE SLAIN HIS SHARE.
HAVE A CARE LEST HE HEAR AND LOOK TO SEE WHO MAKES LIGHT OF THE DEEDS OF THE MIGHTY.
FOR HIS WRATH IS TRULY AWESOME.
HE HATH BEEN KNOWN TO SIT UPON SMALL TROLLS.
URK!
HOGUN?
COMING. I WAS JUST CAUTIONING THESE YOUNG MORTALS TO TREAD WARILY IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE LION.
WHERE DID **HE** COME FROM?

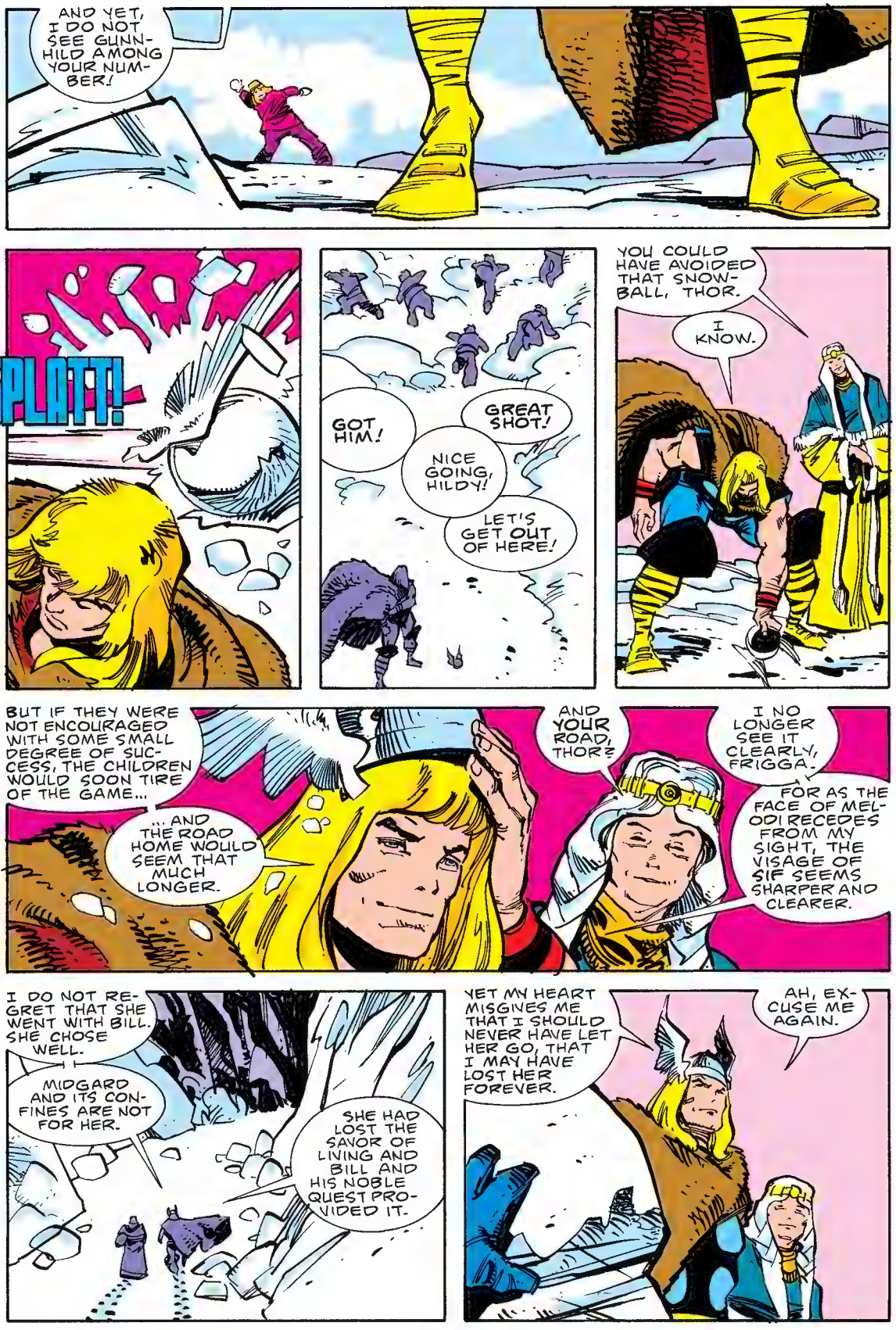

SOME TIME LATER, AS FOUR GOGGLE-EYED CHILDREN ARE TELLING THEIR PARENTS ABOUT GIANTS AND TROLLS...
...ATOP THE NORTH TOWER OF THE WORLD TRADE CENTER...
DO YOU THINK WE'LL BE ABLE TO LOCATE THEM IF THEY STRIKE AGAIN?
MY HAMMER, STORMBREAKER, IS NOW ATTUNED TO THE ENERGY RELEASE THAT HERALDED THE APPEARANCE OF THE BANDITS.
SHOULD THEY DECIDE TO STRIKE WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF THIS METROPOLIS, WE SHALL KNOW.
THEY SEEM LIKE EAGER THIEVES. I DO NOT THINK WE SHALL HAVE LONG TO WAIT.
DO YOU REMEMBER, BILL, OUR TALK IN ASGARD BEFORE LORD ODIN CREATED STORMBREAKER FOR YOU?
YOU SAID YOU HAD SURRENDERED YOUR HUMANITY TO BECOME THE GUARDIAN OF YOUR PEOPLE.
YOU WERE WRONG.
I HAVE LIVED A LONG TIME, BILL. I HAVE NEVER ENCOUNTERED ANOTHER WHO WAS SO POWERFUL, YET SO VULNERABLE.
I WOULD NEVER HAVE BELIEVED IT POSSIBLE IN A MORTAL.
AND WHY DO YOU SMILE, LADY?
BECAUSE I FIND THAT I HAVE MORE SYMPATHY NOW FOR THOR AND HIS ROMANCE WITH A MORTAL THAN I EVER DID LIVING IN ASGARD.
IT IS NOT AS SIMPLE AS I MIGHT HAVE THOUGHT.
MORTALS LIVE SO SHORT A TIME.
PERHAPS THIS IS WHY ODIN FORBADE THOR'S LOVE FOR JANE FOSTER*.
IT WOULD BE SO EASY TO RENOUNCE ONE'S HERITAGE.
*A LONG TIME AGO!

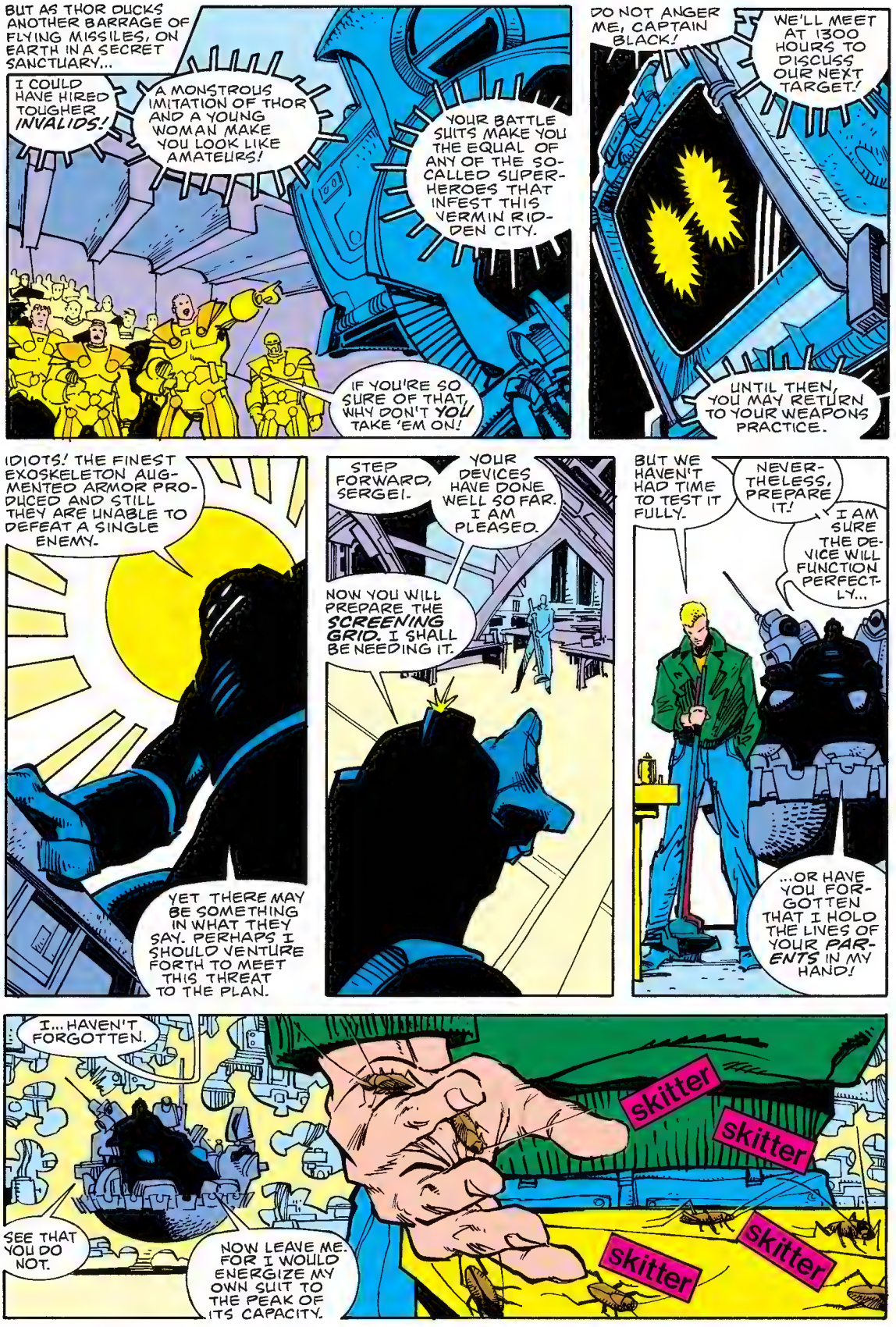

MEANWHILE IN ASGARD AT THE EDGE OF THE WASTES...
I AM ALWAYS SURPRISED, LOKI, TO DISCOVER THAT YOUR AERIE IS SO... HANDSOMELY APPOINTED.
I THOUGHT SORCERERS LIVED LIVES OF AUSTERITY, MORTIFYING THEIR FLESH AND SUFFERING.
MANY DO, LORELEI. ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE NOT PARTICULARLY SUCCESSFUL.
AND BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT SUCCESSFUL, THEY MEASURE THEIR SUCCESS IN ATTAINABLE GOALS, SUCH AS POVERTY, WANT, AND HUNGER.
A DEPRESSING BREED. CERTAINLY NOT WORTH EMULATING.
AND YOU?
... AM MODESTLY RETICENT ABOUT MY ACHIEVEMENTS.
BUT MY GOALS ARE CLEAR.
SO IS YOUR AURA OF POWER, LOKI, HOWEVER RETICENT YOU MAY BE.
I CAN FEEL ITS HEAT ABOVE THAT OF THE FIRE. IT... IS FASCINATING.
I HAVE NEVER FELT ANYTHING LIKE IT BEFORE.
TELL ME, DID YOU NOT ONCE HAVE A WIFE?


HA. THAT, MY DEAR, WAS OVER LONG AGO.
BUT I WOULD PREFER TO DISCUSS THE PRESENT. AND THOR.
THOR! THOR! ALWAYS THOR! LOKI, HE'S SO UNBEARABLY DULL!
AND HE DOESN'T ALWAYS DO WHAT I WANT HIM TO! HE DIDN'T COME BACK TO ME WHEN THE FIGHTING WAS DONE.
*THOR 354
BUT HE WILL, MY DEAR. HE WILL.
BEFORE, HE THOUGHT YOU WERE A MORTAL WOMAN NAMED MELODI.
WHEN YOU HAVE USED THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOX, THOR WON'T CARE WHO YOU ARE...
ARE YOU SURE? WHAT IS IT?
A...GIFT FROM LOFN, THE GODDESS WHO INSPIRES PASSION IN MEN OR GODS, TO HEIGHTS UNDREAMED OF!
HE WILL BE YOURS ...FOREVER!
ONCE HE HAS BEEN CLOAKED IN ITS SCENT, THOR WILL BE YOUR SLAVE. YOUR MEREST WHIM WILL BE HIS IRONCLAD COMMAND!
AND WITH ODIN GONE, AND THE THRONE OF ASGARD EMPTY, WHAT BETTER TIME TO RULE HIS SON?
IF YOU BUT SUGGEST THAT HE MIGHT SUPPORT LOKI IN HIS BID TO GAIN THE CROWN...
...WHY, HE WOULD WALK THROUGH FIRE TO SEE THAT IT IS DONE!
AND ONCE THE THRONE IS LOKI'S, WHO KNOWS WHAT FOUL ACCIDENT MIGHT BEFALL THE NOBLE SON OF ODIN!
AND ONCE THOR IS MINE...
...WHO KNOWS WHAT HIS POWER MIGHT ACCOMPLISH AT MY COMMAND!

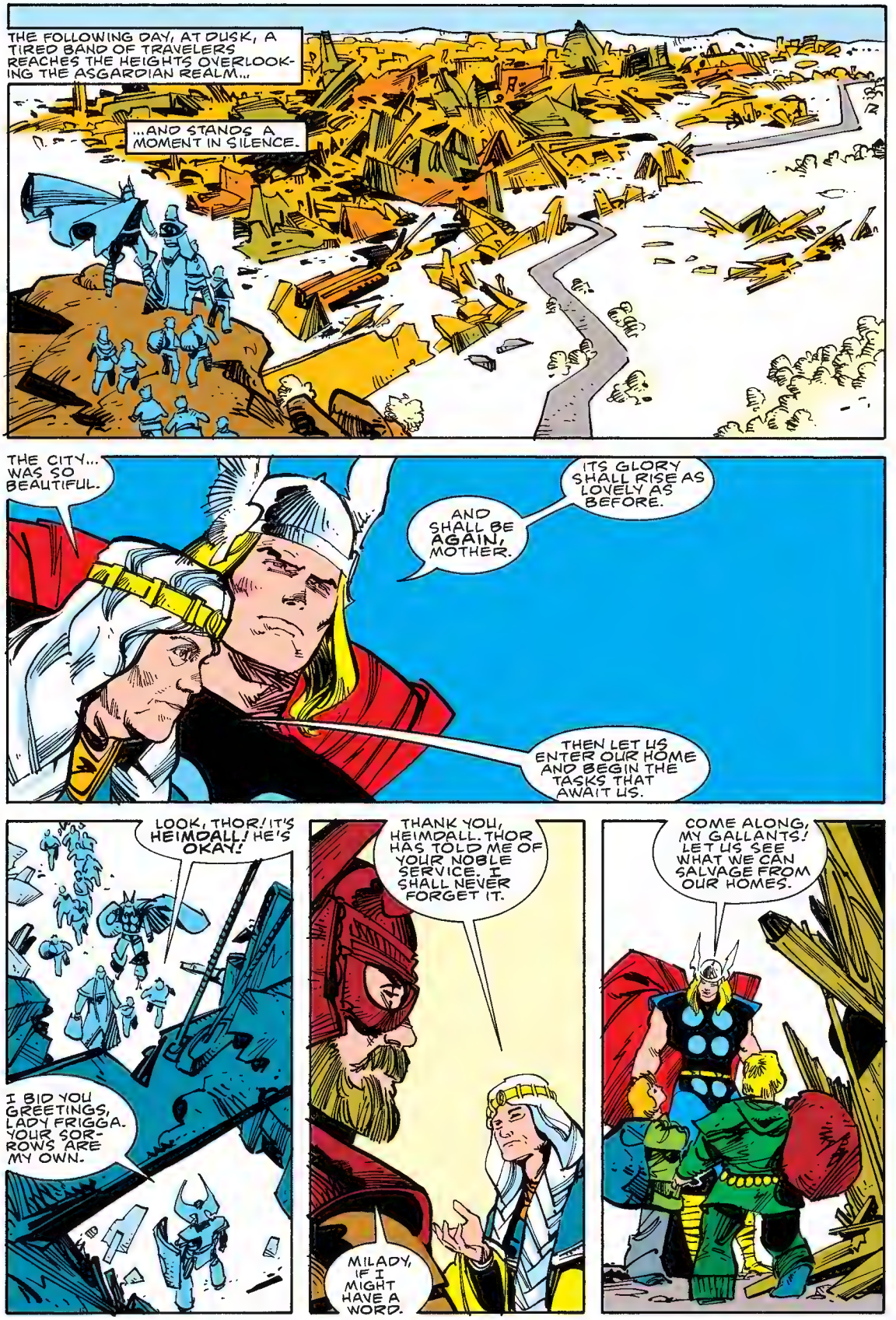

NIGHTFALL, AS AMONG THE RUINS OF THE GREAT CITY OF THE GODS...
ASGARD AT LAST!
THOUGH THE RAINBOW BRIDGE IS BROKEN, MY ENCHANTMENTS HAVE BROUGHT ME HOME!
BUT ONLY BARELY. THE RIFT BETWEEN MIDGARD AND ASGARD IS ALREADY WIDENING!
I CAN SCARCE BELIEVE MY EYES! THE CITY LIES IN RUINS! THE STRUGGLE HERE WAS GREATER THAN WE KNEW!
AND ODIN! MY MAGIC CANNOT DETECT HIS POWER AT ALL!
'TIS AS THOUGH HE WAS SWALLOWED UP AND NEVER EXISTED!
SO THIS IS HOW THE WAR ENDS.
WELL, I'VE NO LOVE LOST FOR ODIN AND DO NOT LAMENT HIS PASSING...
...BUT I SWORE, SISTER, THAT YOU WOULD RUE THE DAY YOU REFUSED TO AID US IN OUR STRUGGLE AGAINST THE SONS OF MUSPELL.
AND SO YOU SHALL.
FOR HERE BEFORE ME I SEE THE GREAT SCEPTER OF ODIN, STILL SEETHING WITH POWER...
...LYING NO DOUBT WHERE IT FELL IN THAT LAST GREAT STRUGGLE!
YES, THIS WILL BE PERFECT!
YOU HAVE SOUGHT THOR, LORELEI. YOU SHALL FIND SOMEONE ELSE!
SOMEONE YOU DESERVE!
FOR IT TAKES NO FORESIGHT TO KNOW WHO WILL SEEK OUT THE SCEPTER WITH ODIN GONE!
AND WHEN HE DOES, SISTER, YOUR FATE WILL BE SEALED!

DAYLIGHT IN THE SNOWY HILLS OF ASGARD AS WE FIND...
SHHH.
HERE THEY COME!
GET READY!
IT WAS THE STRANGEST THING, FRIGGA.
I LOVED THIS MORTAL WOMAN, MELODI, WITH ALL MY HEART, SUDDENLY, FURIOUSLY, LIKE A STORM.
AND YET, AS THE WEEKS HAVE GONE BY, HER FACE RECEDES FROM MY MEMORY LIKE A DREAM.
AND I BEGIN TO WONDER IF PERHAPS I WAS NOT DREAMING. STILL--
OH, EXCUSE ME A MOMENT.
WHITHH!
WHITHH!
WHITHH!
WHAT HAVE WE HERE? BE THESE THE FORCES OF THE EVIL FROST FAERIES BEHIND THIS WALL OF SNOW?
YOW!
LOOK OUT!
OR MERELY SOME UNRULY CHILDREN WHO LOOK TO RECEIVE A SNOW BATH?


AND YET, I DO NOT SEE GUNNHILD AMONG YOUR NUMBER!
SPLATT!
GOT HIM!
GREAT SHOT!
NICE GOING, HILDY!
LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!
YOU COULD HAVE AVOIDED THAT SNOWBALL, THOR.
I KNOW.
BUT IF THEY WERE NOT ENCOURAGED WITH SOME SMALL DEGREE OF SUCCESS, THE CHILDREN WOULD SOON TIRE OF THE GAME...
... AND THE ROAD HOME WOULD SEEM THAT MUCH LONGER.
AND YOUR ROAD, THOR?
I NO LONGER SEE IT CLEARLY, FRIGGA.
FOR AS THE FACE OF MELODI RECEDES FROM MY SIGHT, THE VISAGE OF SIF SEEMS SHARPER AND CLEARER.
I DO NOT REGRET THAT SHE WENT WITH BILL. SHE CHOSE WELL.
MIDGARD AND ITS CONFINES ARE NOT FOR HER.
SHE HAD LOST THE SAVOR OF LIVING AND BILL AND HIS NOBLE QUEST PROVIDED IT.
YET MY HEART MISGIVES ME THAT I SHOULD NEVER HAVE LET HER GO, THAT I MAY HAVE LOST HER FOREVER.
AH, EXCUSE ME AGAIN.

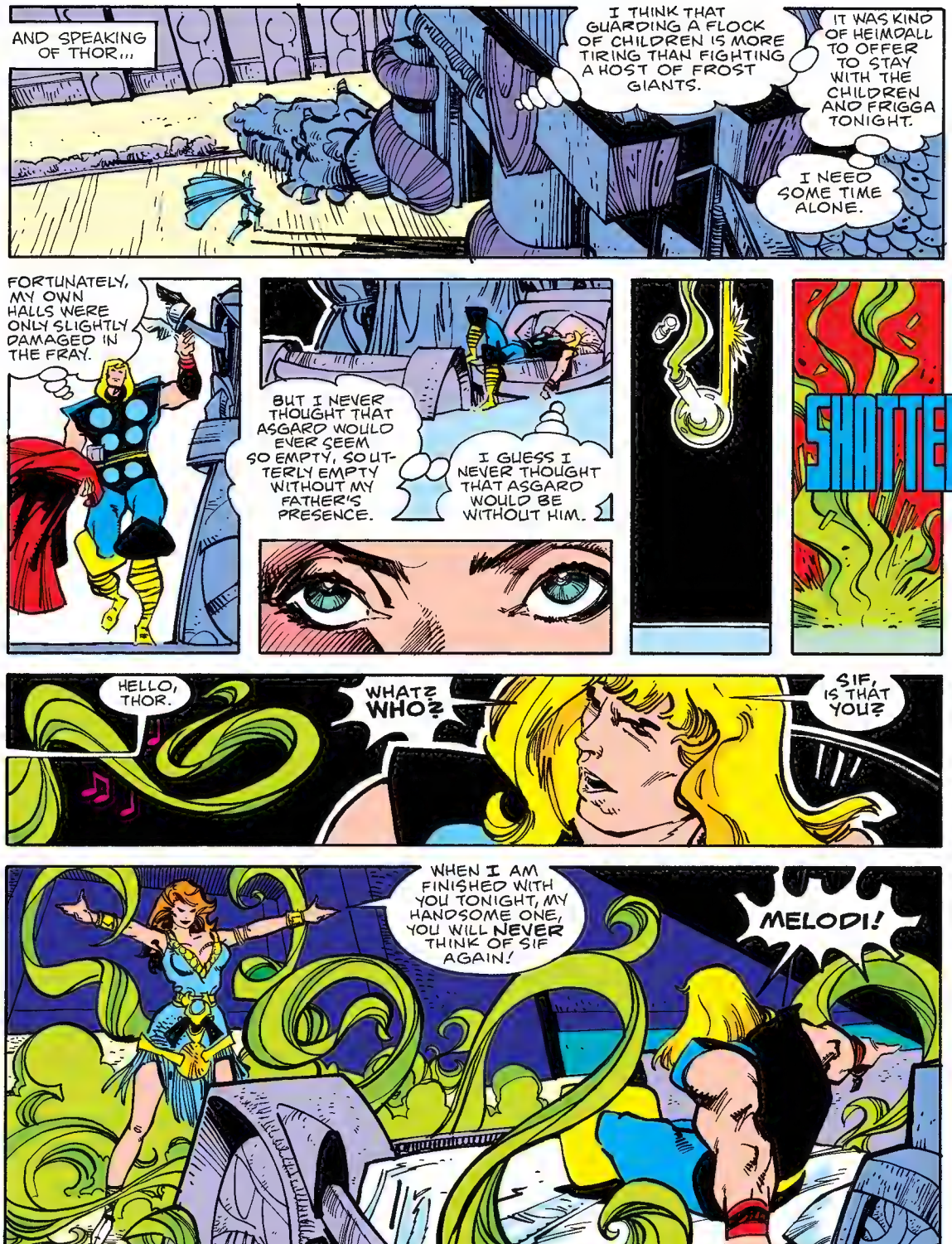

BUT AS THOR DUCKS ANOTHER BARRAGE OF FLYING MISSILES, ON EARTH IN A SECRET SANCTUARY...
I COULD HAVE HIRED TOUGHER INVALIDS!
A MONSTROUS IMITATION OF THOR AND A YOUNG WOMAN MAKE YOU LOOK LIKE AMATEURS!
YOUR BATTLE SUITS MAKE YOU THE EQUAL OF ANY OF THE SO-CALLED SUPER-HEROES THAT INFEST THIS VERMIN RIDDEN CITY.
IF YOU'RE SO SURE OF THAT, WHY DON'T YOU TAKE 'EM ON!
DO NOT ANGER ME, CAPTAIN BLACK!
WE'LL MEET AT 1300 HOURS TO DISCUSS OUR NEXT TARGET!
UNTIL THEN, YOU MAY RETURN TO YOUR WEAPONS PRACTICE.
IDIOTS! THE FINEST EXOSKELETON AUGMENTED ARMOR PRODUCED AND STILL THEY ARE UNABLE TO DEFEAT A SINGLE ENEMY.
YET THERE MAY BE SOMETHING IN WHAT THEY SAY. PERHAPS I SHOULD VENTURE FORTH TO MEET THIS THREAT TO THE PLAN.
STEP FORWARD, SERGEI.
YOUR DEVICES HAVE DONE WELL SO FAR. I AM PLEASED.
NOW YOU WILL PREPARE THE SCREENING GRID. I SHALL BE NEEDING IT.
BUT WE HAVEN'T HAD TIME TO TEST IT FULLY.
NEVERTHELESS, PREPARE IT!
I AM SURE THE DEVICE WILL FUNCTION PERFECTLY...
...OR HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN THAT I HOLD THE LIVES OF YOUR PARENTS IN MY HAND!
I... HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN.
SEE THAT YOU DO NOT.
NOW LEAVE ME. FOR I WOULD ENERGIZE MY OWN SUIT TO THE PEAK OF ITS CAPACITY.
skitter
skitter
skitter
skitter

THE RUINS OF ASGARD, NIGHT-TIME...
... AND EVEN THE SHADOWS DRAW BACK AS THE CLOAKED FIGURE GLIDES SILENTLY ACROSS THE RUBBLE.
AH. I HAVE FOUND IT.
ODIN'S SCEPTER OF POWER.
WITHIN MY GRASP... JUST AS THE THRONE WILL BE.
CURIOUS. FOR A MOMENT I FELT A TINGLE AS THOUGH--
--BUT NO. 'TIS MERELY THE POWER OF THE SCEPTER ITSELF FLOWING THROUGH ME.
A FEELING I HAVE LONG WAITED TO SAVOR.
A FEELING I SHALL SOON SAVOR FOREVER!
GREETINGS, LOKI.
HEIM-DALL!
MY THANKS FOR RE-COVERING THE GREAT SCEPTER.
WITH ODIN GONE, IT MUST BE HELD CAREFULLY IN TRUST UNTIL ANOTHER GOD SITS UPON THE HIGH SEAT.
'TWAS MY PLEASURE, HEIMDALL. THE GUARDIAN OF THE RAINBOW BRIDGE SHOULD HAVE SOME DUTIES NOW THAT THE BRIDGE NO LONGER EXISTS!
AND THERE ARE NONE SO TRUSTWORTHY AS YOURSELF TO GUARD THE SCEPTER.
CON-SIDERING THOSE WHO REMAIN IN ASGARD, LOKI...
...YOU HAVE VOICED MY THOUGHTS EXACTLY.


THE FOLLOWING DAY, AT DUSK, A TIRED BAND OF TRAVELERS REACHES THE HEIGHTS OVERLOOKING THE ASGARDIAN REALM...
...AND STANDS A MOMENT IN SILENCE.
THE CITY... WAS SO BEAUTIFUL.
AND SHALL BE AGAIN, MOTHER.
ITS GLORY SHALL RISE AS LOVELY AS BEFORE.
THEN LET US ENTER OUR HOME AND BEGIN THE TASKS THAT AWAIT US.
LOOK, THOR! IT'S HEIMDALL! HE'S OKAY!
I BID YOU GREETINGS, LADY FRIGGA. YOUR SORROWS ARE MY OWN.
THANK YOU, HEIMDALL. THOR HAS TOLD ME OF YOUR NOBLE SERVICE. I SHALL NEVER FORGET IT.
MILADY, IF I MIGHT HAVE A WORD.
COME ALONG, MY GALLANTS! LET US SEE WHAT WE CAN SALVAGE FROM OUR HOMES.

SOONER WOULD I HAVE CUT OFF MY ARM THAN GIVE THIS GIFT, MILADY.
BUT THERE IS NO HELP FOR IT NOW.
AND NO ONE IS MORE WORTHY TO HOLD THIS SACRED TRUST.
THE GREAT SCEPTER, MILADY. THE SYMBOL OF ALL OUR HOPES...
...AND SOR-ROWS.
FRIGGA! FRIGGA!
MY HOUSE IS GONE! AND I CAN'T FIND MY SKATES ANY-WHERE!
WHERE'S MY MOMMY? I WANT MY DADDY!
WHY AREN'T THEY HERE?
SHUSH, MY LITTLE ONE, AND DRY YOUR TEARS.
YOUR PARENTS WILL BE HOME SOON, I PROMISE.
BUT NOW, I WANT YOU ALL TO STAY WITH ME UNTIL EVERYBODY'S PARENTS COME HOME.
WE SHOULD START BY TRYING TO FIND SOME SUPPER, DON'T YOU THINK?

BUT AS DUSK FALLS ON ASGARD, TWO SOULS IN MANHATTAN SPEAK QUIETLY IN THE GATHERING GLOOM WHILE THE EVENING WRAPS THEM IN SHADOW...
WHEN WILL YOU BE LEAVING EARTH, BILL?
WHEN THOR RETURNS, I SHALL DEPART FOR MY OWN PEOPLE.
I MUST STILL GUIDE THEM TO THEIR NEW HOME.
OH, IT HURTS!
SIF?
WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT A VICTORY COULD CHANGE SO MUCH?
ASGARD WILL BE IN CHAOS WHEN THE WARRIORS RETURN HOME AND LEARN THAT ODIN IS GONE.
AND I AM SURE THAT LOKI IS ALREADY PLANNING TO SIT UPON THE HIGH SEAT IN ODIN'S STEAD.
AND THOR? HE HAS LOST HIS FATHER. HOW CAN I STAY AWAY?
DON'T YOU SEE? I MUST GO BACK.
YOU ALWAYS FIND A WAY TO MAKE ME SMILE.
I HAVE THOUGHT OF A WAY TO RETURN OUR TROOPS TO ASGARD, BILL.
I MUST GO BACK TO THE GOLDEN REALM... AND THOR.
A LACK OF PRACTICE?
OF COURSE YOU MUST, MILADY.
I HAVE KNOWN THAT SINCE YOU TOLD ME ODIN WAS LOST IN THE BATTLE.
I WOULD HAVE ASKED YOU TO RETURN WITH ME ERE THIS BUT I KNEW YOU COULD NOT.
NOT NOW.
AND TO THINK I WAS AFRAID TO SPEAK OF MY DECISION FOR FEAR OF A MORTAL'S REACTION.
ONE THING YOU HAVE TAUGHT ME IS THAT I DO NOT UNDERSTAND MORTALS WELL.


AND SPEAKING OF THOR...
I THINK THAT GUARDING A FLOCK OF CHILDREN IS MORE TIRING THAN FIGHTING A HOST OF FROST GIANTS.
IT WAS KIND OF HEIMDALL TO OFFER TO STAY WITH THE CHILDREN AND FRIGGA TONIGHT.
I NEED SOME TIME ALONE.
FORTUNATELY, MY OWN HALLS WERE ONLY SLIGHTLY DAMAGED IN THE FRAY.
BUT I NEVER THOUGHT THAT ASGARD WOULD EVER SEEM SO EMPTY, SO UTTERLY EMPTY WITHOUT MY FATHER'S PRESENCE.
I GUESS I NEVER THOUGHT THAT ASGARD WOULD BE WITHOUT HIM.
SHATTER!
HELLO, THOR.
WHAT? WHO?
SIF, IS THAT YOU?
WHEN I AM FINISHED WITH YOU TONIGHT, MY HANDSOME ONE, YOU WILL NEVER THINK OF SIF AGAIN!
MELODI!

NEXT: IS THOR BECOMING A **ROMANCE COMIC?** HAS MARVEL'S FABULOUS, ROCK 'EM-SOCK 'EM BOOK DEGENERATED INTO NOTHING MORE THAN PUERILE **SOAP OPERA?** WILL KISSING BECOME THE **RULE** RATHER THAN THE **EXCEPTION?** IS NOTHING SACRED?

DON'T HOLD YOUR **BREATH!!** AND DON'T MISS OUR **NEXT** ISSUE!

WHEN DALLIANCE WAS IN FLOWER!!

MARVEL
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AUTHO
the mighty
THOR

STAN LEE PRESENTS: the MIGHTY THOR®

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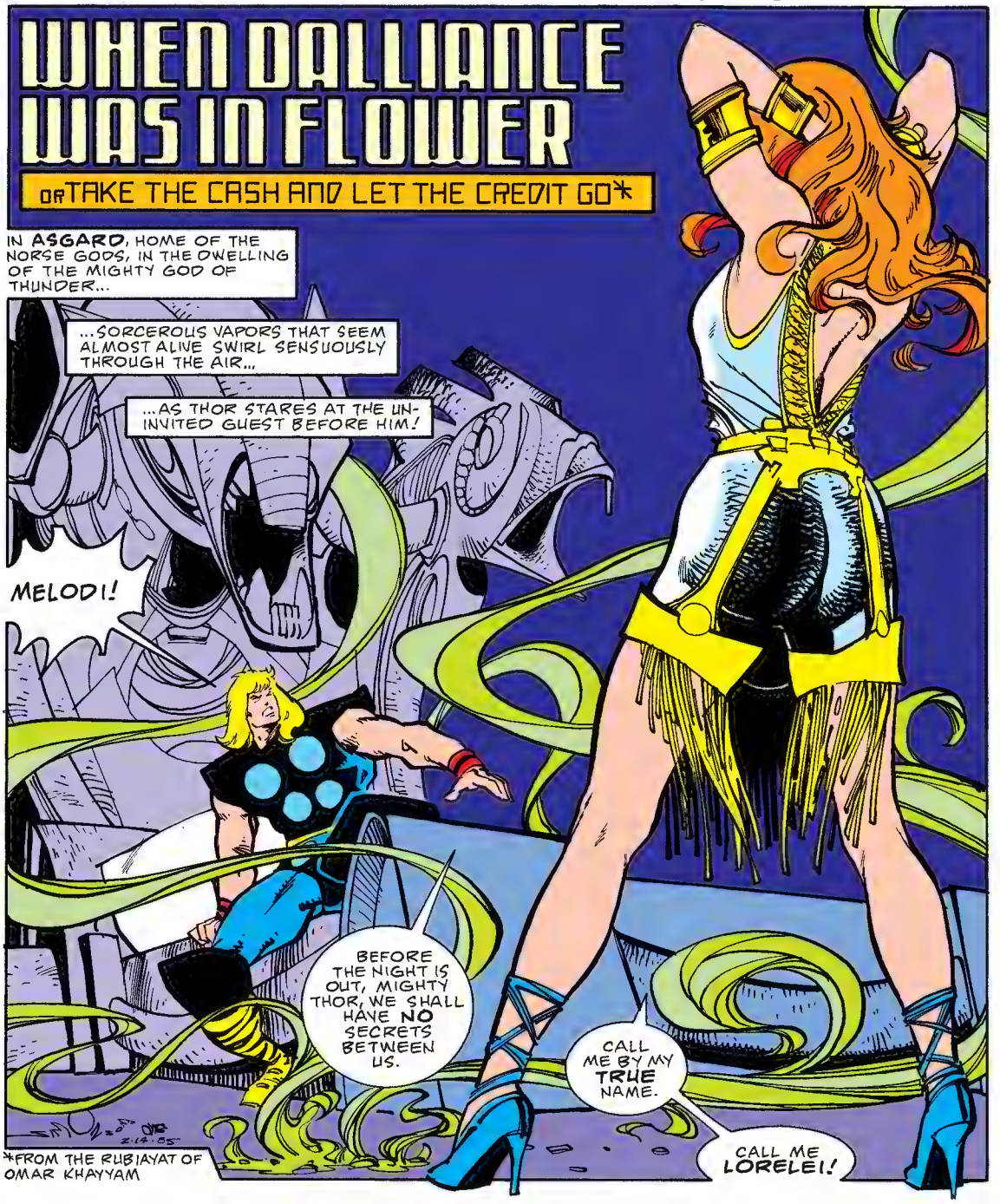
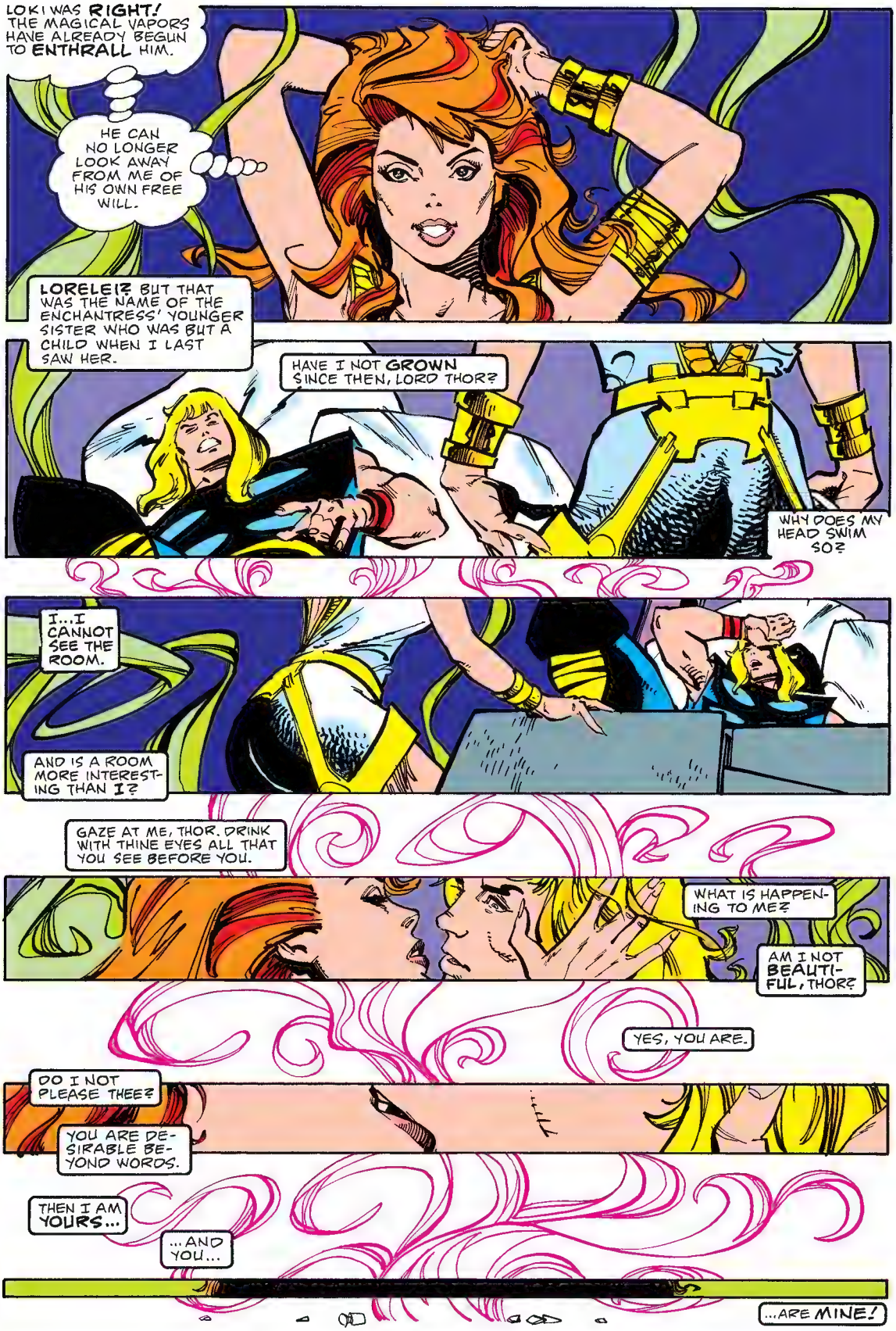
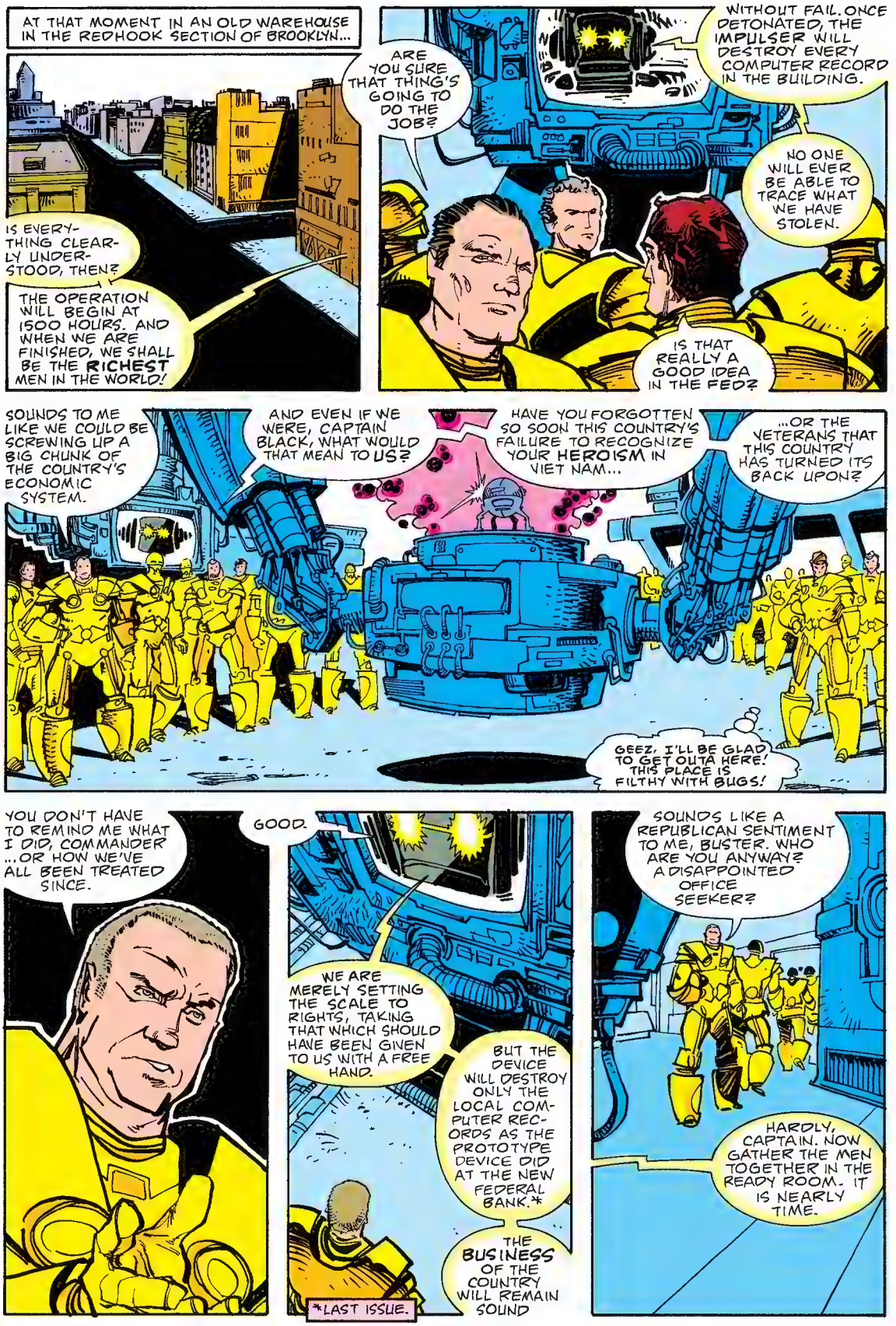
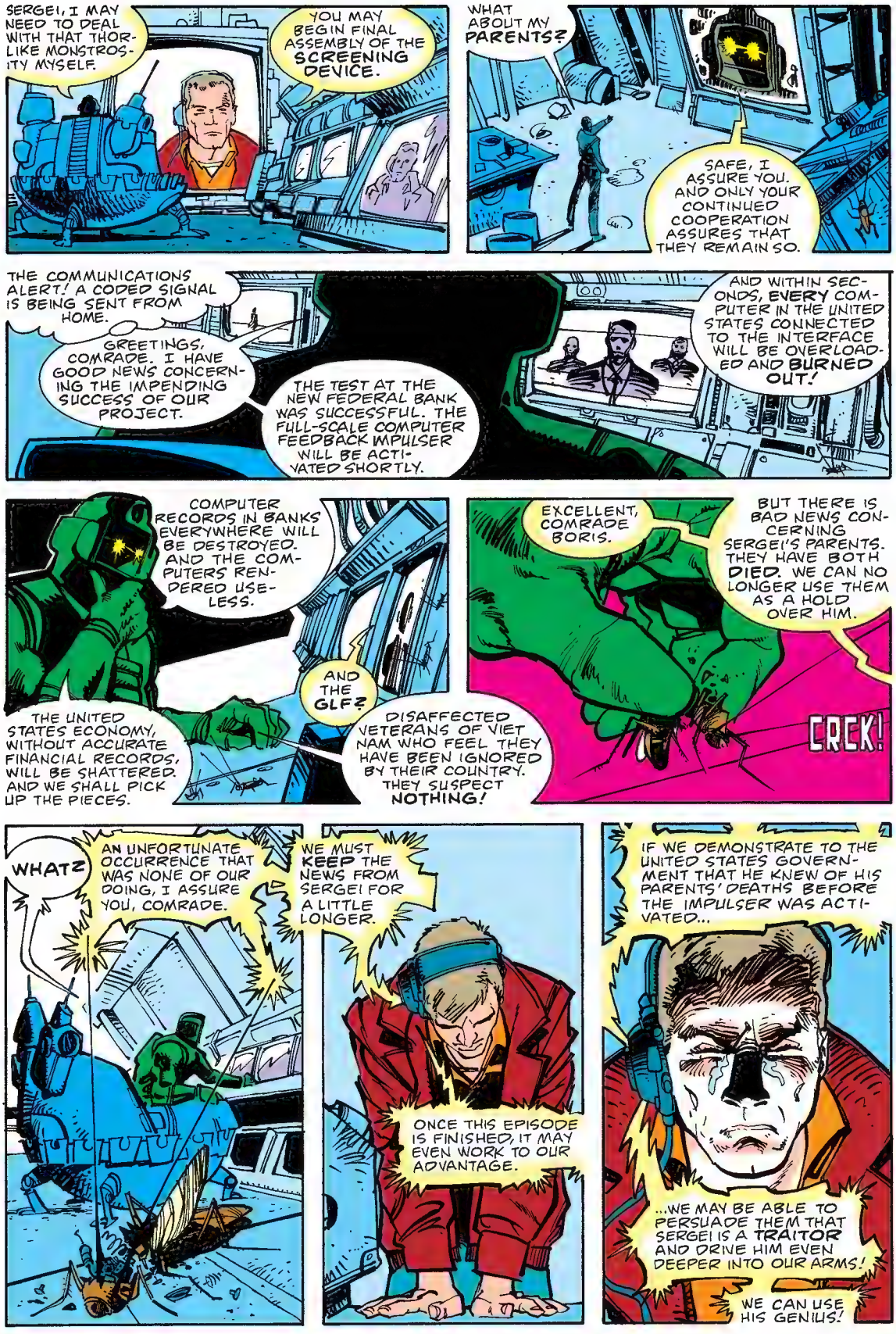
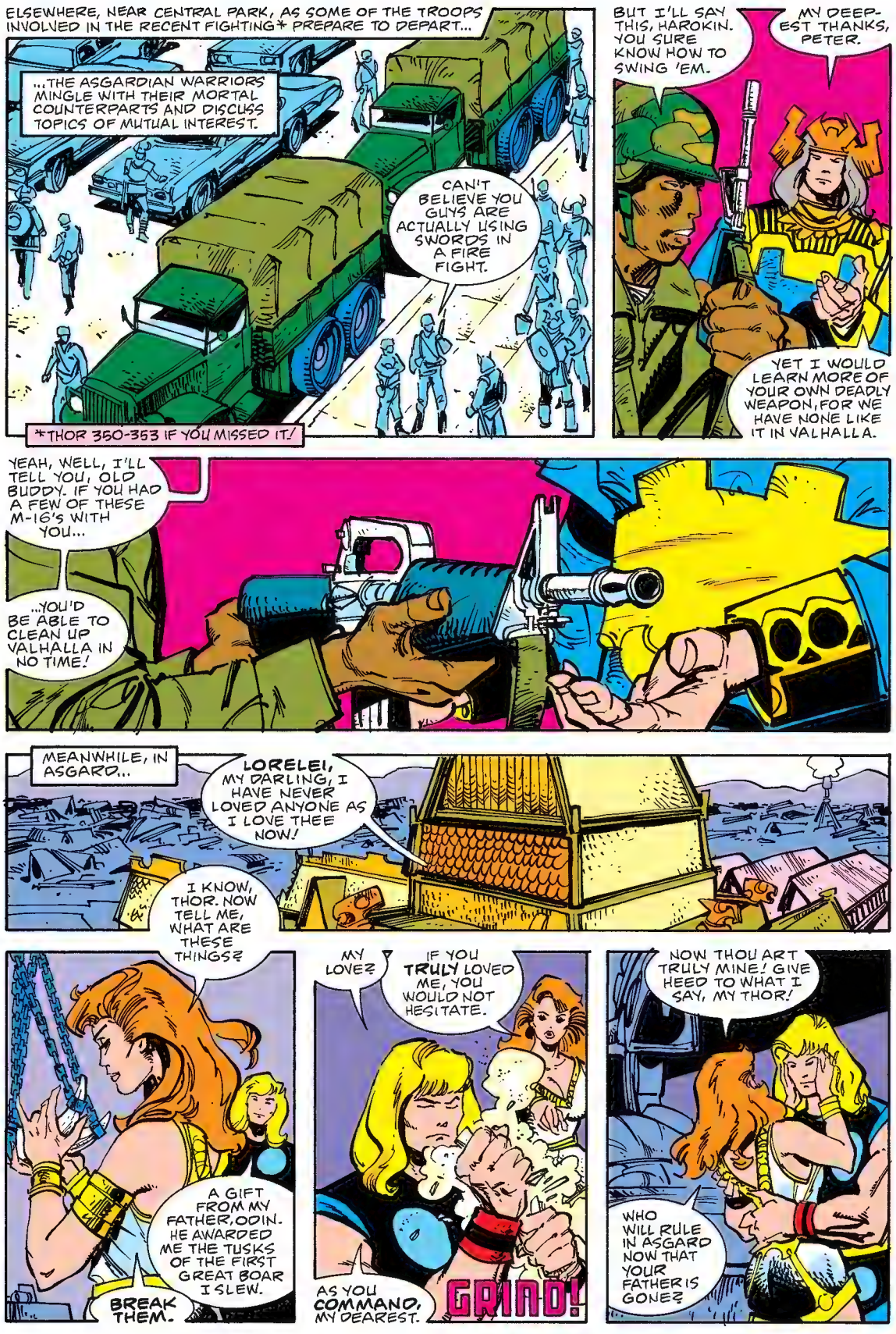

WHEN DALLIANCE WAS IN FLOWER
OR TAKE THE CASH AND LET THE CREDIT GO*
IN ASGARD, HOME OF THE NORSE GODS, IN THE DWELLING OF THE MIGHTY GOD OF THUNDER...
...SORCEROUS VAPORS THAT SEEM ALMOST ALIVE SWIRL SENSUOUSLY THROUGH THE AIR...
...AS THOR STARES AT THE UN-INVITED GUEST BEFORE HIM!
MELODI!
BEFORE THE NIGHT IS OUT, MIGHTY THOR, WE SHALL HAVE NO SECRETS BETWEEN US.
CALL ME BY MY TRUE NAME.
CALL ME LORELEI!
*FROM THE RUBIAYAT OF OMAR KHAYYAM

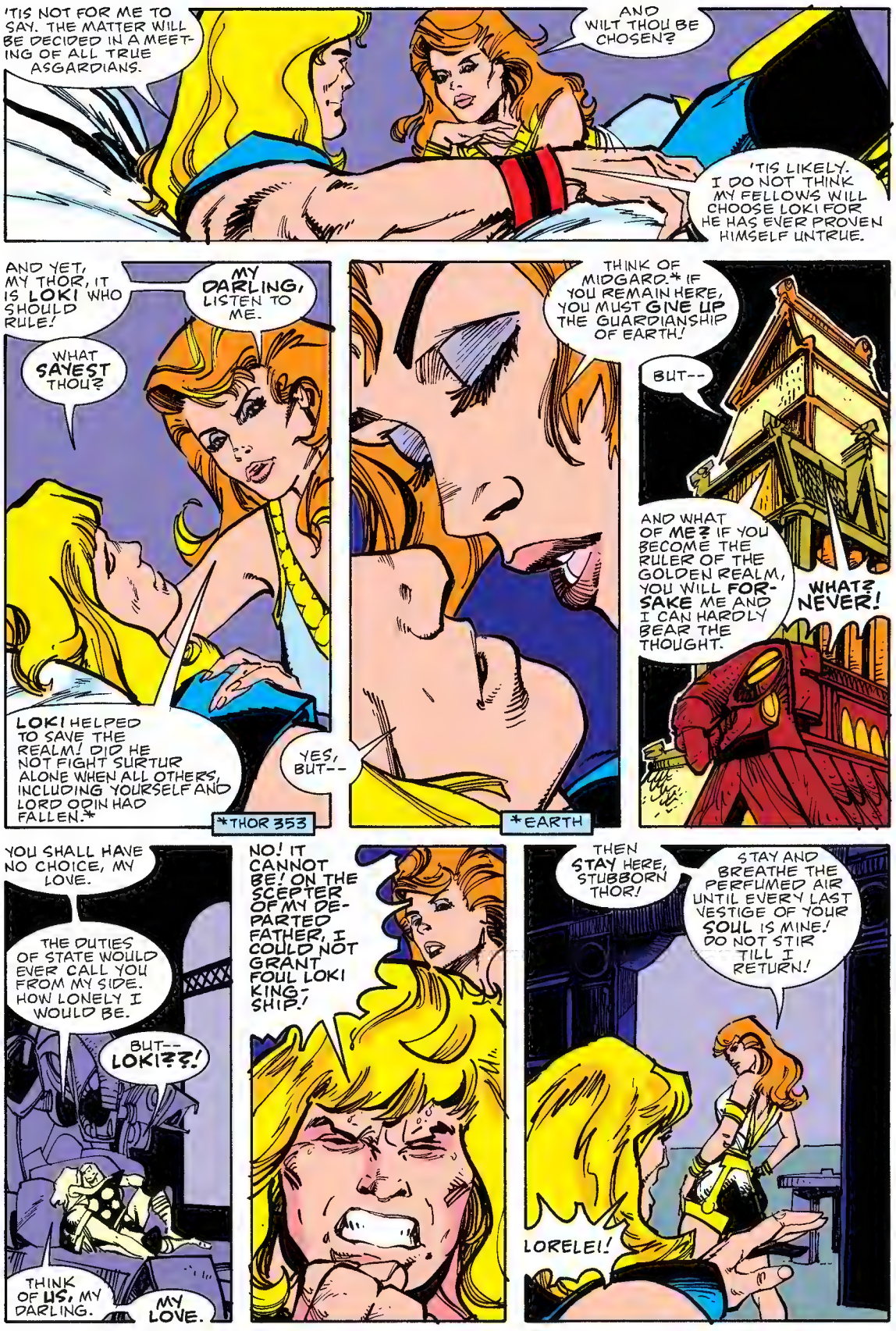

LOKI WAS RIGHT! THE MAGICAL VAPORS HAVE ALREADY BEGUN TO ENTHRALL HIM.
HE CAN NO LONGER LOOK AWAY FROM ME OF HIS OWN FREE WILL.
LORELEI? BUT THAT WAS THE NAME OF THE ENCHANTRESS' YOUNGER SISTER WHO WAS BUT A CHILD WHEN I LAST SAW HER.
HAVE I NOT GROWN SINCE THEN, LORD THOR?
WHY DOES MY HEAD SWIM SO?
I...I CANNOT SEE THE ROOM.
AND IS A ROOM MORE INTERESTING THAN I?
GAZE AT ME, THOR. DRINK WITH THINE EYES ALL THAT YOU SEE BEFORE YOU.
WHAT IS HAPPENING TO ME?
AM I NOT BEAUTIFUL, THOR?
YES, YOU ARE.
DO I NOT PLEASE THEE?
YOU ARE DESIRABLE BEYOND WORDS.
THEN I AM YOURS...
...AND YOU...
...ARE MINE!

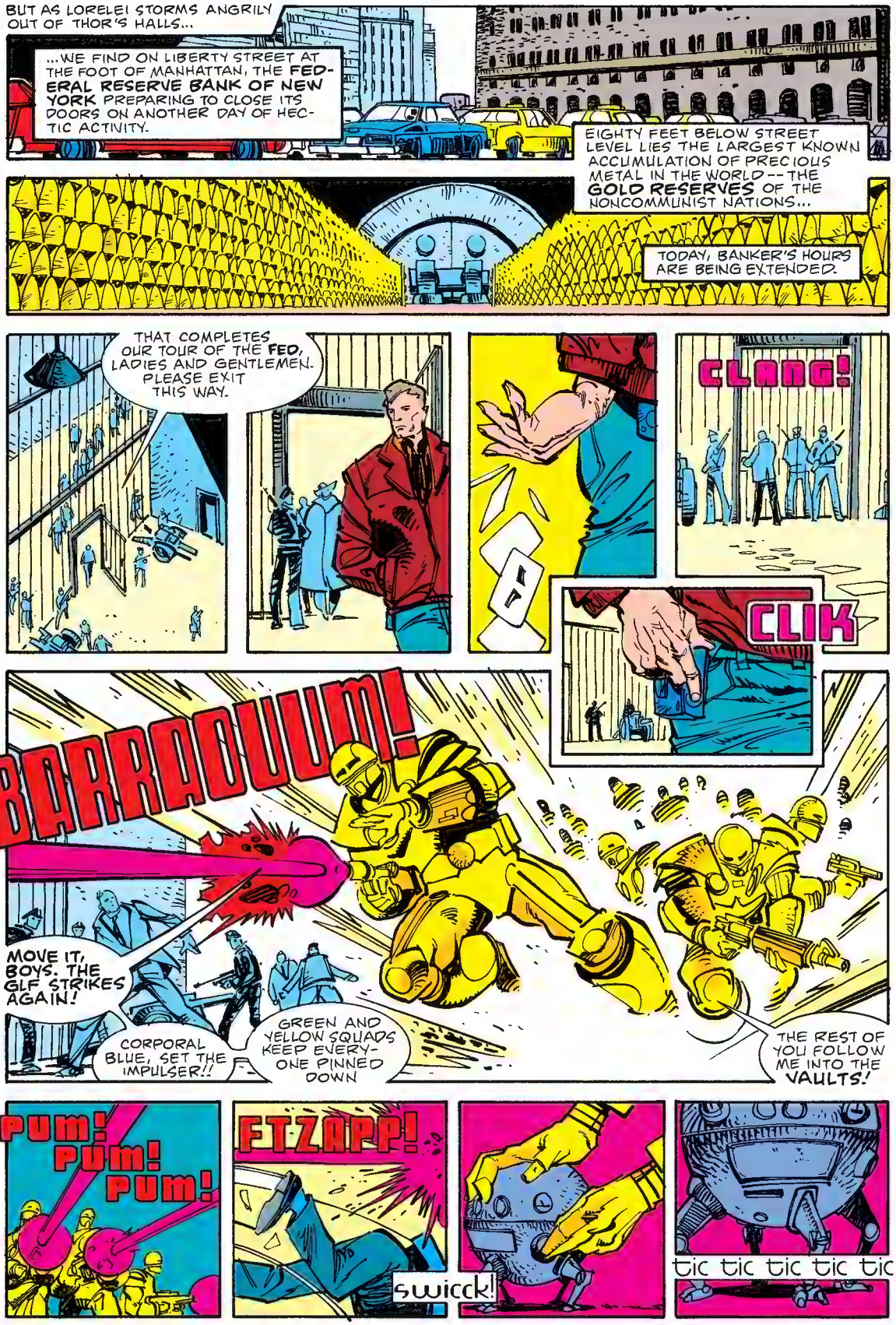
BUT EVEN AS THOR FALLS DEEPER AND DEEPER BENEATH THE SEDUCTIVE SPELLS BEING WOUND ABOUT HIM...
...WE TURN TO THE TOP OF THE WORLD TRADE CENTER IN NEW YORK CITY WHERE WE FIND BETA RAY BILL AND THE LADY SIF...
I CAN FIND NO SIGN OF OUR ERSTWHILE FOEMAN, MILADY.
IT WOULD SEEM THAT THEY HAVE NOT DECIDED TO RENEW THEIR ATTACKS UPON THE PEOPLE OF THE CITY.
IT MAY BE SOME TIME BEFORE THEY APPEAR AGAIN.
TIME, BILL, IS SOMETHING THAT AN IMMORTAL HAS APLENTY.
PERHAPS TOO MUCH.
MILADY?
WHEN THERE IS ALWAYS TIME, BILL, THE PASSION OF LIFE DIMINISHES.
I HAVE LOVED THOR, BILL. I LOVE HIM STILL. AND YET, I STAND HERE, DIVIDED IN TWO.
ONCE SAID, SOME WORDS MAY NOT EASILY BE TAKEN BACK AGAIN. HAVE A CARE, MILADY, WHAT YOU SHOULD SAY.
I HAVE HAD TOO MANY CARES, BILL. SO MANY THAT I CAN HARDLY SAY WHAT I MEAN ANY LONGER.
SURELY THERE IS MORE TO LOVING THAN THAT!
...REGARDLESS OF THE YEARS I HAVE LIVED ALREADY!
THE LONGER I AM ON EARTH, THE MORE CERTAIN I AM THAT I HAVE YET TO DRINK FULLY FROM LIFE'S CUP...

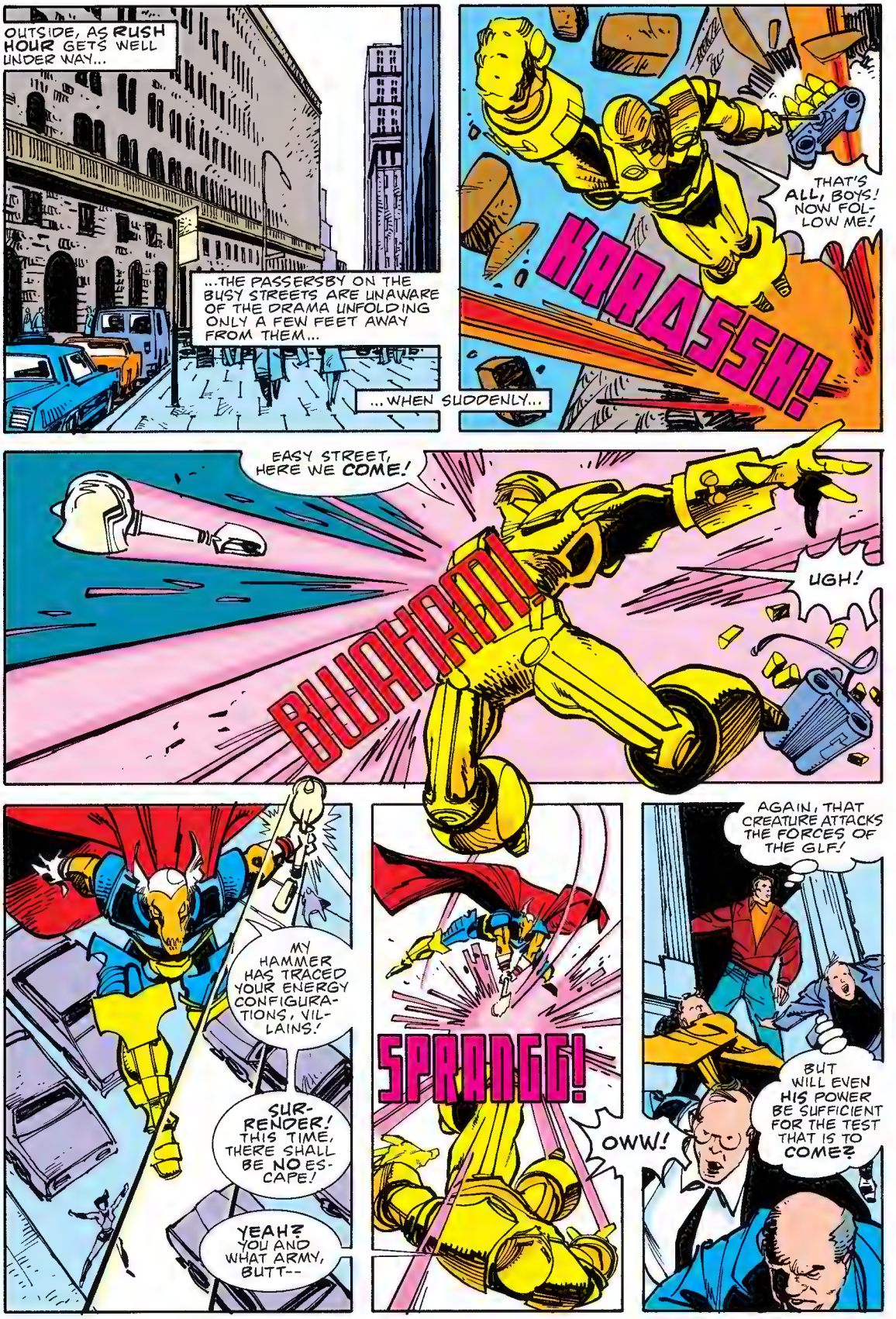

AT THAT MOMENT IN AN OLD WAREHOUSE IN THE REDHOOK SECTION OF BROOKLYN...
IS EVERY-THING CLEAR-LY UNDER-STOOD, THEN?
THE OPERATION WILL BEGIN AT 1500 HOURS. AND WHEN WE ARE FINISHED, WE SHALL BE THE RICHEST MEN IN THE WORLD!
ARE YOU SURE THAT THING'S GOING TO DO THE JOB?
WITHOUT FAIL. ONCE DETONATED, THE IMPULSER WILL DESTROY EVERY COMPUTER RECORD IN THE BUILDING.
NO ONE WILL EVER BE ABLE TO TRACE WHAT WE HAVE STOLEN.
IS THAT REALLY A GOOD IDEA IN THE FED?
SOUNDS TO ME LIKE WE COULD BE SCREWING UP A BIG CHUNK OF THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC SYSTEM.
AND EVEN IF WE WERE, CAPTAIN BLACK, WHAT WOULD THAT MEAN TO US?
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN SO SOON THIS COUNTRY'S FAILURE TO RECOGNIZE YOUR HEROISM IN VIET NAM...
...OR THE VETERANS THAT THIS COUNTRY HAS TURNED ITS BACK UPON?
GEEZ, I'LL BE GLAD TO GET OUTA HERE! THIS PLACE IS FILTHY WITH BUGS!
YOU DON'T HAVE TO REMIND ME WHAT I DID, COMMANDER ...OR HOW WE'VE ALL BEEN TREATED SINCE.
GOOD.
WE ARE MERELY SETTING THE SCALE TO RIGHTS, TAKING THAT WHICH SHOULD HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO US WITH A FREE HAND.
BUT THE DEVICE WILL DESTROY ONLY THE LOCAL COM-PUTER REC-ORDS AS THE PROTOTYPE DEVICE DID AT THE NEW FEDERAL BANK.*
THE BUSINESS OF THE COUNTRY WILL REMAIN SOUND
*LAST ISSUE.
SOUNDS LIKE A REPUBLICAN SENTIMENT TO ME, BUSTER. WHO ARE YOU ANYWAY? A DISAPPOINTED OFFICE SEEKER?
HARDLY, CAPTAIN. NOW GATHER THE MEN TOGETHER IN THE READY ROOM. IT IS NEARLY TIME.

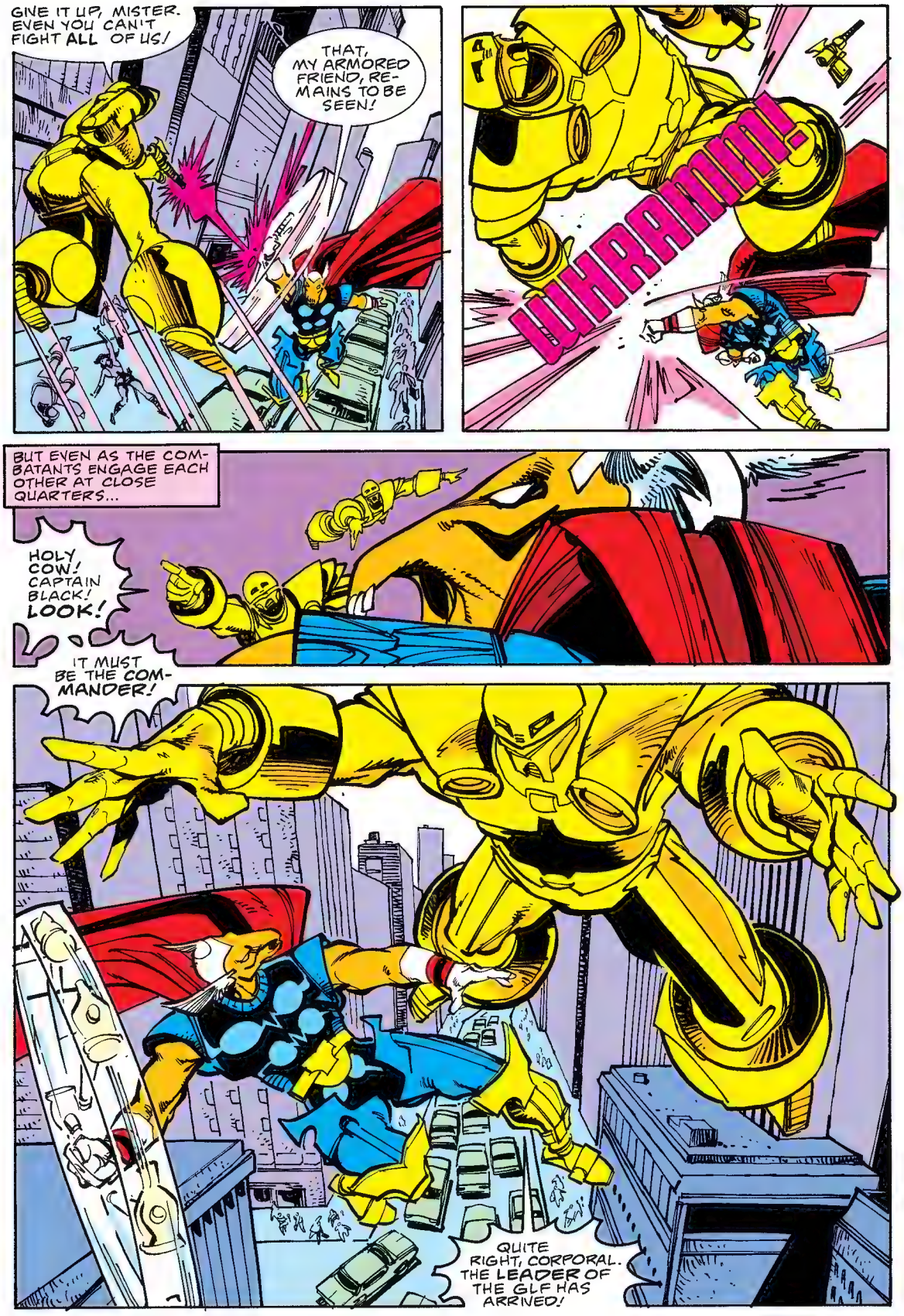

SERGEI, I MAY NEED TO DEAL WITH THAT THOR-LIKE MONSTROSITY MYSELF.
YOU MAY BEGIN FINAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SCREENING DEVICE.
WHAT ABOUT MY PARENTS?
SAFE, I ASSURE YOU. AND ONLY YOUR CONTINUED COOPERATION ASSURES THAT THEY REMAIN SO.
THE COMMUNICATIONS ALERT! A CODED SIGNAL IS BEING SENT FROM HOME.
GREETINGS, COMRADE. I HAVE GOOD NEWS CONCERNING THE IMPENDING SUCCESS OF OUR PROJECT.
THE TEST AT THE NEW FEDERAL BANK WAS SUCCESSFUL. THE FULL-SCALE COMPUTER FEEDBACK IMPULSER WILL BE ACTIVATED SHORTLY.
AND WITHIN SECONDS, EVERY COMPUTER IN THE UNITED STATES CONNECTED TO THE INTERFACE WILL BE OVERLOADED AND BURNED OUT!
COMPUTER RECORDS IN BANKS EVERYWHERE WILL BE DESTROYED. AND THE COMPUTERS RENDERED USELESS.
AND THE GLF?
THE UNITED STATES ECONOMY, WITHOUT ACCURATE FINANCIAL RECORDS, WILL BE SHATTERED. AND WE SHALL PICK UP THE PIECES.
DISAFFECTED VETERANS OF VIET NAM WHO FEEL THEY HAVE BEEN IGNORED BY THEIR COUNTRY. THEY SUSPECT NOTHING!
EXCELLENT, COMRADE BORIS.
BUT THERE IS BAD NEWS CONCERNING SERGEI'S PARENTS. THEY HAVE BOTH DIED. WE CAN NO LONGER USE THEM AS A HOLD OVER HIM.
CRCK!
WHAT?
AN UNFORTUNATE OCCURRENCE THAT WAS NONE OF OUR DOING, I ASSURE YOU, COMRADE.
WE MUST KEEP THE NEWS FROM SERGEI FOR A LITTLE LONGER.
ONCE THIS EPISODE IS FINISHED, IT MAY EVEN WORK TO OUR ADVANTAGE.
IF WE DEMONSTRATE TO THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT THAT HE KNEW OF HIS PARENTS' DEATHS BEFORE THE IMPULSER WAS ACTIVATED...
...WE MAY BE ABLE TO PERSUADE THEM THAT SERGEI IS A TRAITOR AND DRIVE HIM EVEN DEEPER INTO OUR ARMS!
WE CAN USE HIS GENIUS!

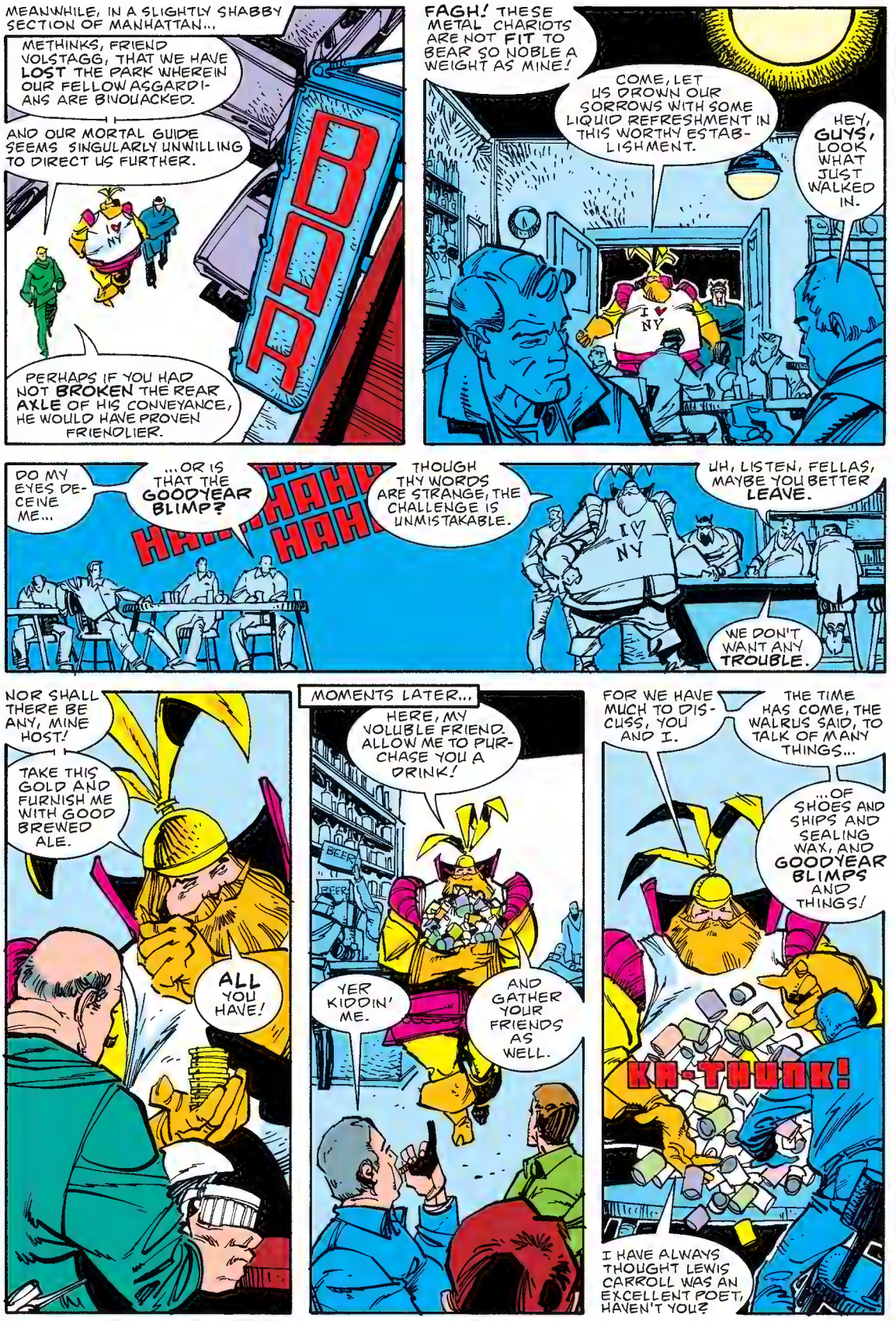

ELSEWHERE, NEAR CENTRAL PARK, AS SOME OF THE TROOPS INVOLVED IN THE RECENT FIGHTING* PREPARE TO DEPART...
...THE ASGARDIAN WARRIORS MINGLE WITH THEIR MORTAL COUNTERPARTS AND DISCUSS TOPICS OF MUTUAL INTEREST.
CAN'T BELIEVE YOU GUYS ARE ACTUALLY USING SWORDS IN A FIRE FIGHT.
*THOR 350-353 IF YOU MISSED IT!
BUT I'LL SAY THIS, HAROKIN. YOU SURE KNOW HOW TO SWING 'EM.
MY DEEPEST THANKS, PETER.
YET I WOULD LEARN MORE OF YOUR OWN DEADLY WEAPON, FOR WE HAVE NONE LIKE IT IN VALHALLA.
YEAH, WELL, I'LL TELL YOU, OLD BUDDY. IF YOU HAD A FEW OF THESE M-16'S WITH YOU...
...YOU'D BE ABLE TO CLEAN UP VALHALLA IN NO TIME!
MEANWHILE, IN ASGARD...
LORELEI, MY DARLING, I HAVE NEVER LOVED ANYONE AS I LOVE THEE NOW!
I KNOW, THOR. NOW TELL ME, WHAT ARE THESE THINGS?
A GIFT FROM MY FATHER, ODIN. HE AWARDED ME THE TUSKS OF THE FIRST GREAT BOAR I SLEW.
BREAK THEM.
MY LOVE?
IF YOU TRULY LOVED ME, YOU WOULD NOT HESITATE.
AS YOU COMMAND, MY DEAREST.
GRIND!
NOW THOU ART TRULY MINE! GIVE HEED TO WHAT I SAY, MY THOR!
WHO WILL RULE IN ASGARD NOW THAT YOUR FATHER IS GONE?

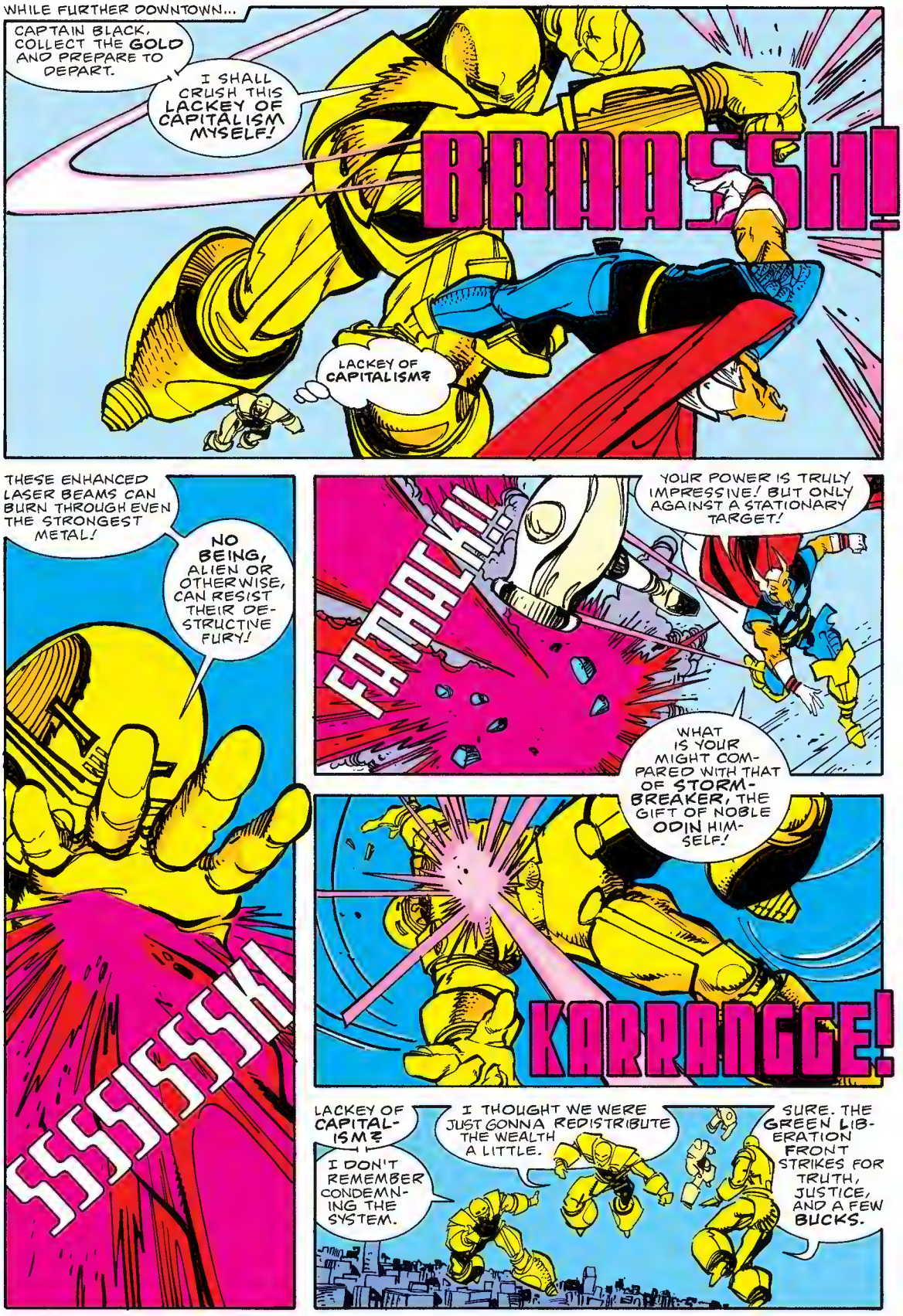

'TIS NOT FOR ME TO SAY. THE MATTER WILL BE DECIDED IN A MEETING OF ALL TRUE ASGARDIANS.
AND WILT THOU BE CHOSEN?
'TIS LIKELY. I DO NOT THINK MY FELLOWS WILL CHOOSE LOKI FOR HE HAS EVER PROVEN HIMSELF UNTRUE.
AND YET, MY THOR, IT IS LOKI WHO SHOULD RULE!
MY DARLING, LISTEN TO ME.
WHAT SAYEST THOU?
LOKI HELPED TO SAVE THE REALM! DID HE NOT FIGHT SURTUR ALONE WHEN ALL OTHERS, INCLUDING YOURSELF AND LORD ODIN HAD FALLEN.*
*THOR 353
YES, BUT--
THINK OF MIDGARD.* IF YOU REMAIN HERE, YOU MUST GIVE UP THE GUARDIANSHIP OF EARTH!
BUT--
AND WHAT OF ME? IF YOU BECOME THE RULER OF THE GOLDEN REALM, YOU WILL FORSAKE ME AND I CAN HARDLY BEAR THE THOUGHT.
WHAT? NEVER!
*EARTH
YOU SHALL HAVE NO CHOICE, MY LOVE.
THE DUTIES OF STATE WOULD EVER CALL YOU FROM MY SIDE. HOW LONELY I WOULD BE.
BUT-- LOKI??!
THINK OF US, MY DARLING.
MY LOVE.
NO! IT CANNOT BE! ON THE SCEPTER OF MY DEPARTED FATHER, I COULD NOT GRANT FOUL LOKI KINGSHIP!
THEN STAY HERE, STUBBORN THOR!
STAY AND BREATHE THE PERFUMED AIR UNTIL EVERY LAST VESTIGE OF YOUR SOUL IS MINE! DO NOT STIR TILL I RETURN!
LORELEI!

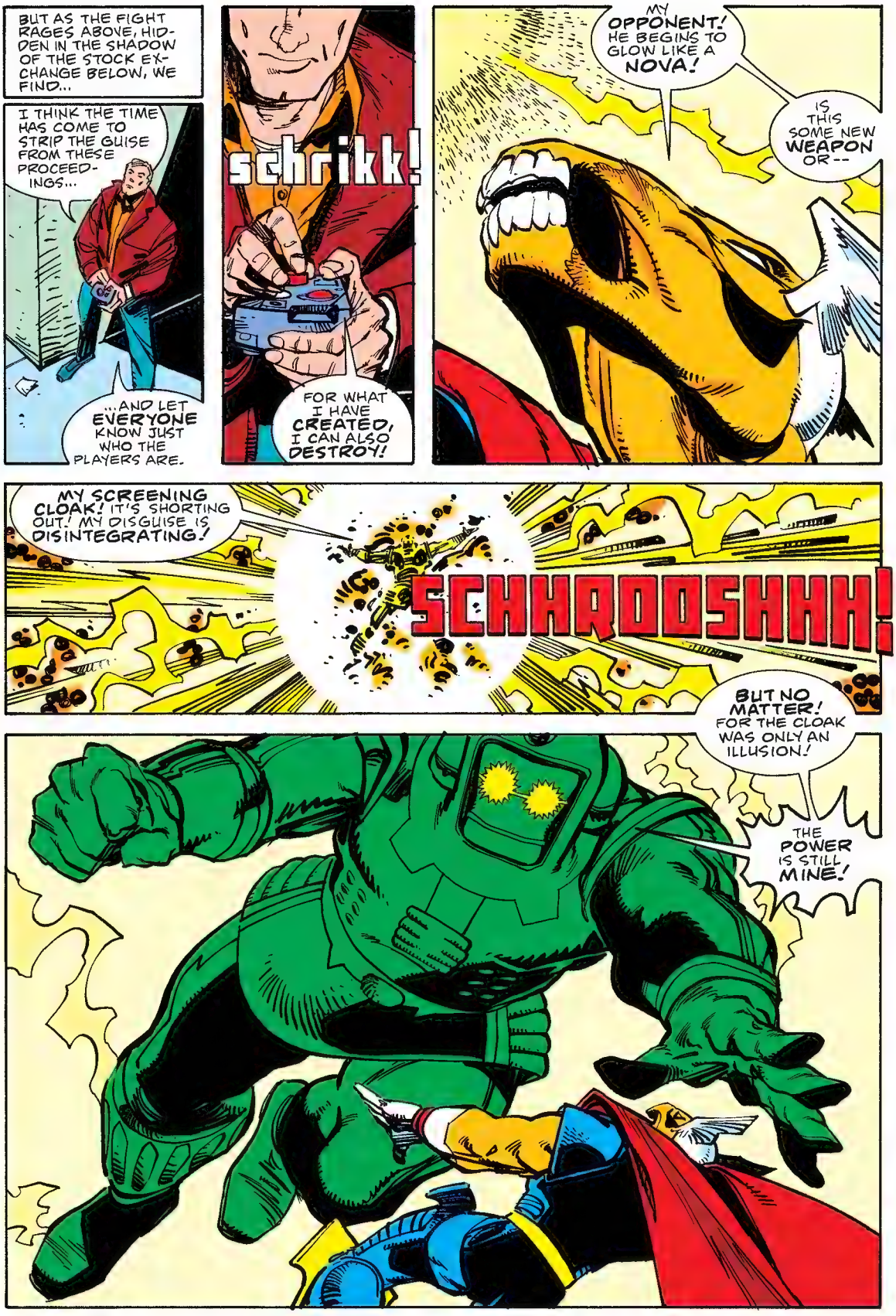

BUT AS LORELEI STORMS ANGRILY OUT OF THOR'S HALLS...
...WE FIND ON LIBERTY STREET AT THE FOOT OF MANHATTAN, THE FEDERAL RESERVE BANK OF NEW YORK PREPARING TO CLOSE ITS DOORS ON ANOTHER DAY OF HECTIC ACTIVITY.
EIGHTY FEET BELOW STREET LEVEL LIES THE LARGEST KNOWN ACCUMULATION OF PRECIOUS METAL IN THE WORLD -- THE GOLD RESERVES OF THE NONCOMMUNIST NATIONS...
TODAY, BANKER'S HOURS ARE BEING EXTENDED.
THAT COMPLETES OUR TOUR OF THE FED, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN. PLEASE EXIT THIS WAY.
CLANG!
CLIK
BARRADUUM!
MOVE IT, BOYS. THE GLF STRIKES AGAIN!
CORPORAL BLUE, SET THE IMPULSER!!
GREEN AND YELLOW SQUADS KEEP EVERY-ONE PINNED DOWN
THE REST OF YOU FOLLOW ME INTO THE VAULTS!
pum! pum! pum!
FTZAPP!
swicck!
tic tic tic tic tic

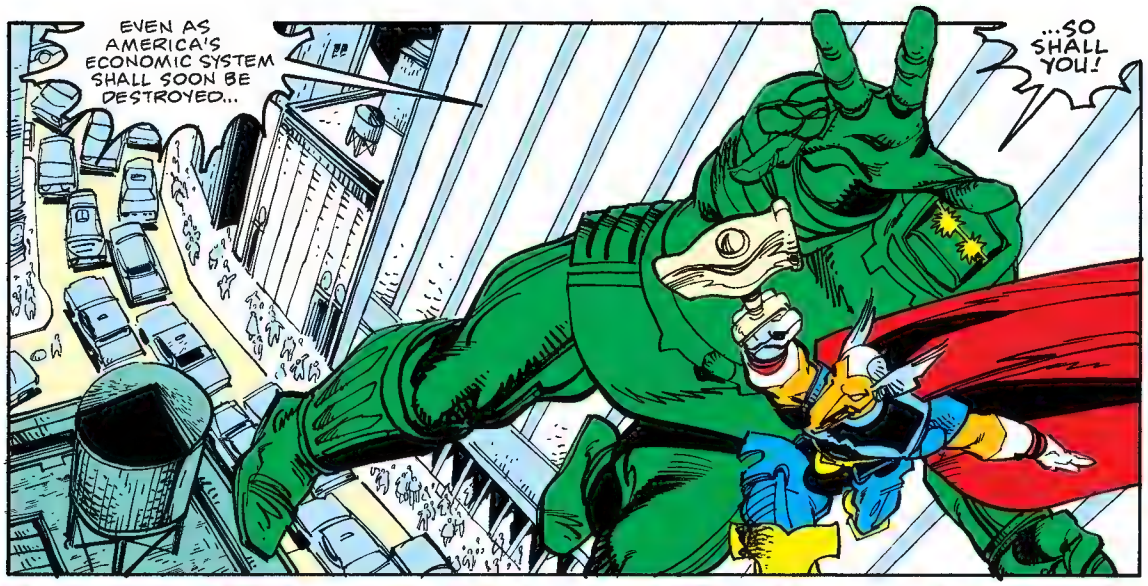

OUTSIDE, AS RUSH HOUR GETS WELL UNDER WAY...
...THE PASSERSBY ON THE BUSY STREETS ARE UNAWARE OF THE DRAMA UNFOLDING ONLY A FEW FEET AWAY FROM THEM...
...WHEN SUDDENLY...
KRAASSH!
THAT'S ALL, BOYS! NOW FOLLOW ME!
EASY STREET, HERE WE COME!
BWAHAM!
UGH!
MY HAMMER HAS TRACED YOUR ENERGY CONFIGURATIONS, VILLAINS!
SURRENDER! THIS TIME, THERE SHALL BE NO ESCAPE!
YEAH? YOU AND WHAT ARMY, BUTT--
SPRANGG!
OWW!
AGAIN, THAT CREATURE ATTACKS THE FORCES OF THE GLF!
BUT WILL EVEN HIS POWER BE SUFFICIENT FOR THE TEST THAT IS TO COME?

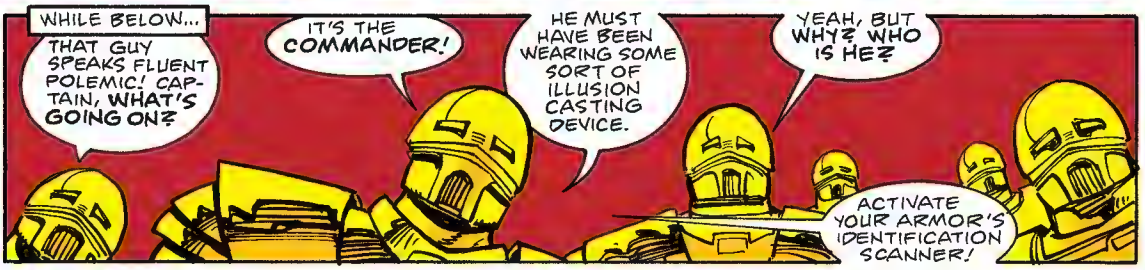

GIVE IT UP, MISTER. EVEN YOU CAN'T FIGHT ALL OF US!
THAT, MY ARMORED FRIEND, REMAINS TO BE SEEN!
WHRAMM!
BUT EVEN AS THE COMBATANTS ENGAGE EACH OTHER AT CLOSE QUARTERS...
HOLY COW! CAPTAIN BLACK! LOOK!
IT MUST BE THE COMMANDER!
QUITE RIGHT, CORPORAL. THE LEADER OF THE GLF HAS ARRIVED!

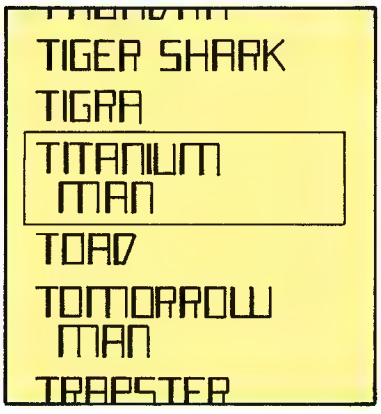

MEANWHILE, IN A SLIGHTLY SHABBY SECTION OF MANHATTAN...
METHINKS, FRIEND VOLSTAGG, THAT WE HAVE LOST THE PARK WHEREIN OUR FELLOW ASGARDIANS ARE BIVOUACKED.
AND OUR MORTAL GUIDE SEEMS SINGULARLY UNWILLING TO DIRECT US FURTHER.
BOAR
PERHAPS IF YOU HAD NOT BROKEN THE REAR AXLE OF HIS CONVEYANCE, HE WOULD HAVE PROVEN FRIENDLIER.
FAGH! THESE METAL CHARIOTS ARE NOT FIT TO BEAR SO NOBLE A WEIGHT AS MINE!
COME, LET US DROWN OUR SORROWS WITH SOME LIQUID REFRESHMENT IN THIS WORTHY ESTABLISHMENT.
HEY, GUYS, LOOK WHAT JUST WALKED IN.
I ♥ NY
DO MY EYES DECEIVE ME...
...OR IS THAT THE GOODYEAR BLIMP?
HA...HAH HAH
THOUGH THY WORDS ARE STRANGE, THE CHALLENGE IS UNMISTAKABLE.
UH, LISTEN, FELLAS, MAYBE YOU BETTER LEAVE.
WE DON'T WANT ANY TROUBLE.
NOR SHALL THERE BE ANY, MINE HOST!
TAKE THIS GOLD AND FURNISH ME WITH GOOD BREWED ALE.
ALL YOU HAVE!
MOMENTS LATER...
HERE, MY VOLUBLE FRIEND. ALLOW ME TO PURCHASE YOU A DRINK!
BEER
YER KIDDIN' ME.
AND GATHER YOUR FRIENDS AS WELL.
FOR WE HAVE MUCH TO DISCUSS, YOU AND I.
THE TIME HAS COME, THE WALRUS SAID, TO TALK OF MANY THINGS...
...OF SHOES AND SHIPS AND SEALING WAX, AND GOODYEAR BLIMPS AND THINGS!
KA-THUNK!
I HAVE ALWAYS THOUGHT LEWIS CARROLL WAS AN EXCELLENT POET, HAVEN'T YOU?

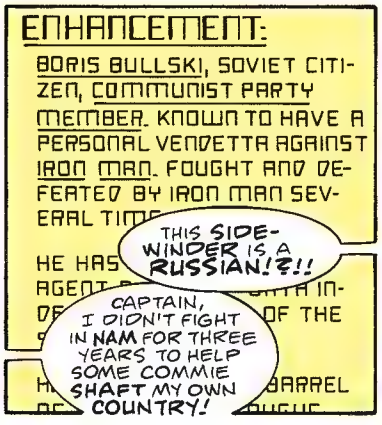

WHILE FURTHER DOWNTOWN...
CAPTAIN BLACK, COLLECT THE GOLD AND PREPARE TO DEPART.
I SHALL CRUSH THIS LACKEY OF CAPITALISM MYSELF!
BRAASSH!
LACKEY OF CAPITALISM?
THESE ENHANCED LASER BEAMS CAN BURN THROUGH EVEN THE STRONGEST METAL!
NO BEING, ALIEN OR OTHERWISE, CAN RESIST THEIR DESTRUCTIVE FURY!
SSSSSSSK!
FATHACK!!
YOUR POWER IS TRULY IMPRESSIVE! BUT ONLY AGAINST A STATIONARY TARGET!
WHAT IS YOUR MIGHT COMPARED WITH THAT OF STORMBREAKER, THE GIFT OF NOBLE ODIN HIMSELF!
KARRANGGE!
LACKEY OF CAPITALISM?
I DON'T REMEMBER CONDEMNING THE SYSTEM.
I THOUGHT WE WERE JUST GONNA REDISTRIBUTE THE WEALTH A LITTLE.
SURE. THE GREEN LIBERATION FRONT STRIKES FOR TRUTH, JUSTICE, AND A FEW BUCKS.

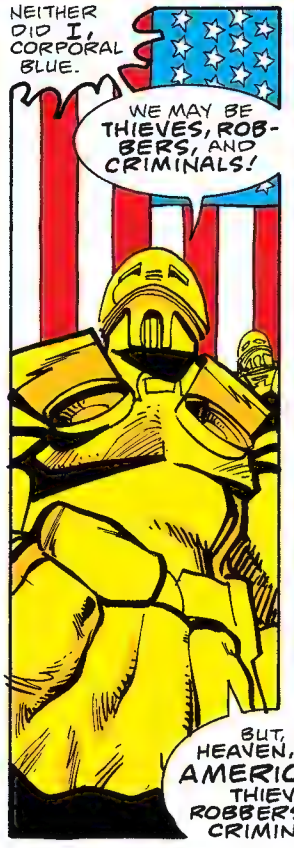

BUT AS THE FIGHT RAGES ABOVE, HIDDEN IN THE SHADOW OF THE STOCK EXCHANGE BELOW, WE FIND...
I THINK THE TIME HAS COME TO STRIP THE GUISE FROM THESE PROCEEDINGS...
...AND LET EVERYONE KNOW JUST WHO THE PLAYERS ARE.
schrikk!
FOR WHAT I HAVE CREATED, I CAN ALSO DESTROY!
MY OPPONENT! HE BEGINS TO GLOW LIKE A NOVA!
IS THIS SOME NEW WEAPON OR--
MY SCREENING CLOAK! IT'S SHORTING OUT! MY DISGUISE IS DISINTEGRATING!
SCHHROOSHHH!
BUT NO MATTER! FOR THE CLOAK WAS ONLY AN ILLUSION!
THE POWER IS STILL MINE!

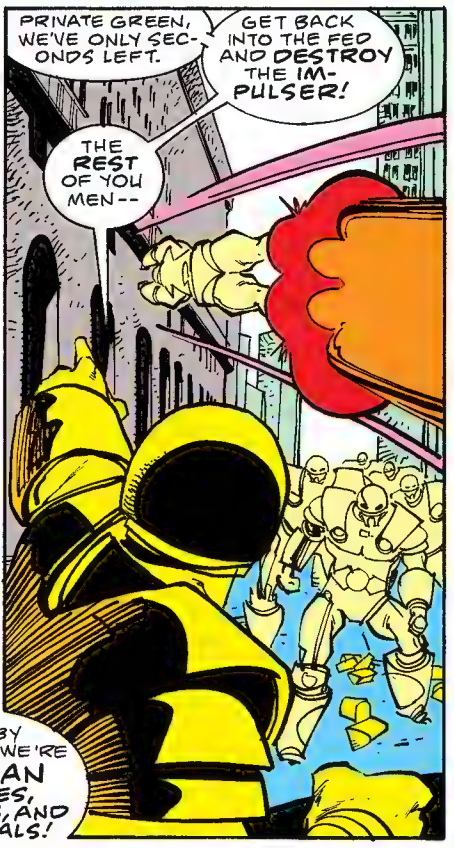

EVEN AS AMERICA'S ECONOMIC SYSTEM SHALL SOON BE DESTROYED...
...SO SHALL YOU!

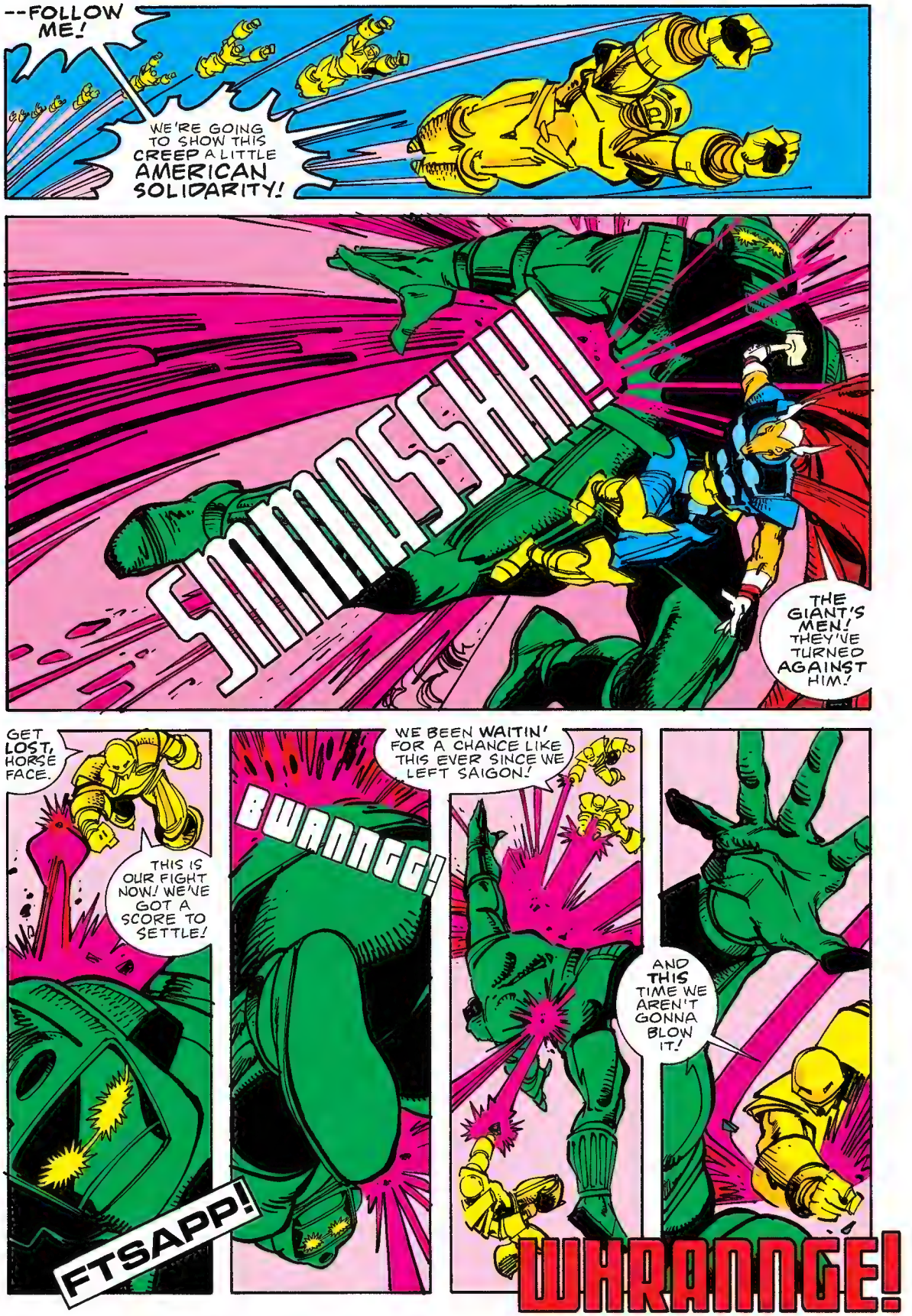

WHILE BELOW...
THAT GUY SPEAKS FLUENT POLEMIC! CAPTAIN, WHAT'S GOING ON?
IT'S THE COMMANDER!
HE MUST HAVE BEEN WEARING SOME SORT OF ILLUSION CASTING DEVICE.
YEAH, BUT WHY? WHO IS HE?
ACTIVATE YOUR ARMOR'S IDENTIFICATION SCANNER!


TIGER SHARK
TIGRA
TITANIUM MAN
TOAD
TOMORROW MAN
TRAPSTER

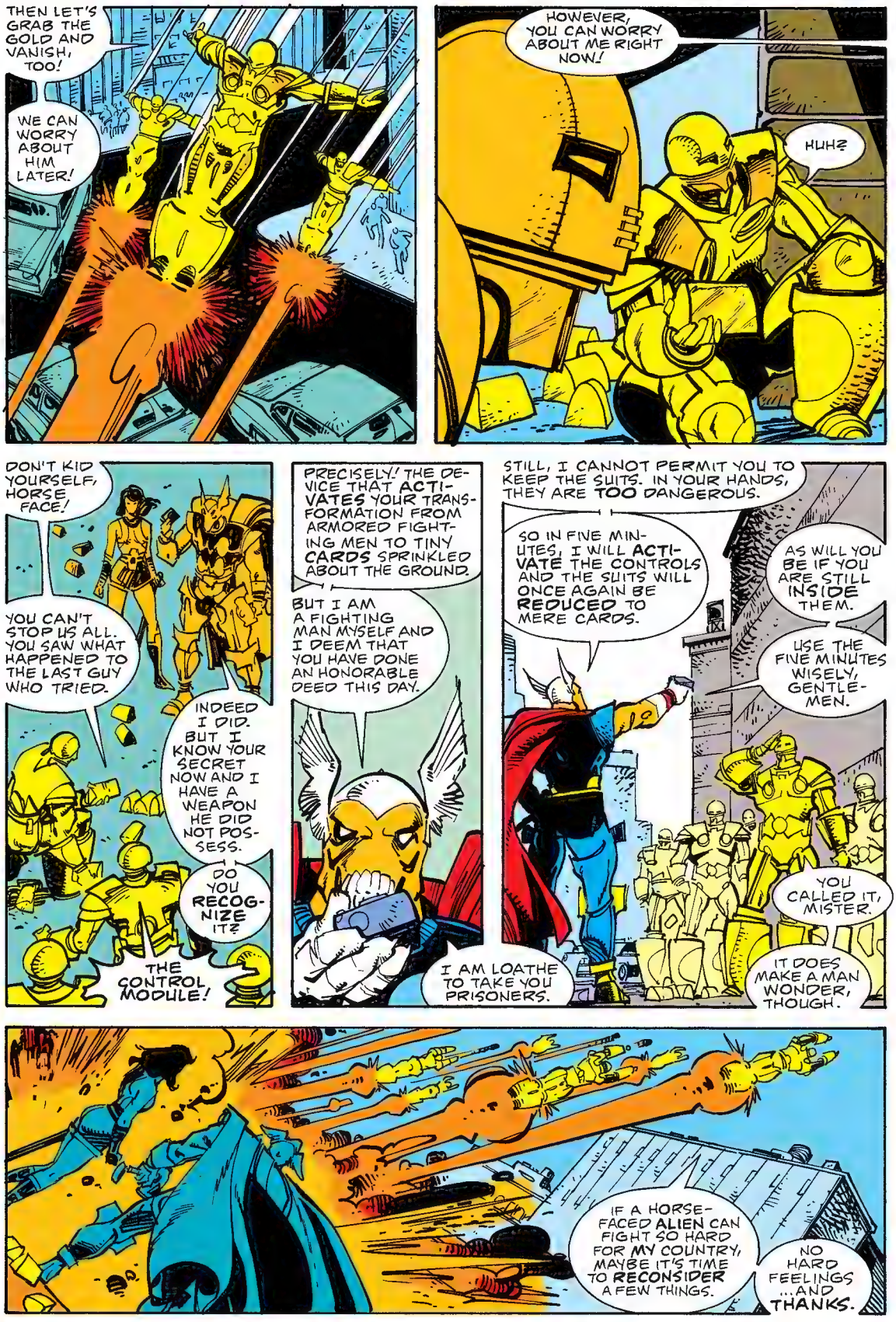

ENHANCEMENT:
BORIS BULLSKI, SOVIET CITIZEN, COMMUNIST PARTY MEMBER. KNOWN TO HAVE A PERSONAL VENDETTA AGAINST IRON MAN. FOUGHT AND DEFEATED BY IRON MAN SEVERAL TIM
THIS SIDEWINDER IS A RUSSIAN!?!!
CAPTAIN, I DIDN'T FIGHT IN NAM FOR THREE YEARS TO HELP SOME COMMIE SHAFT MY OWN COUNTRY!

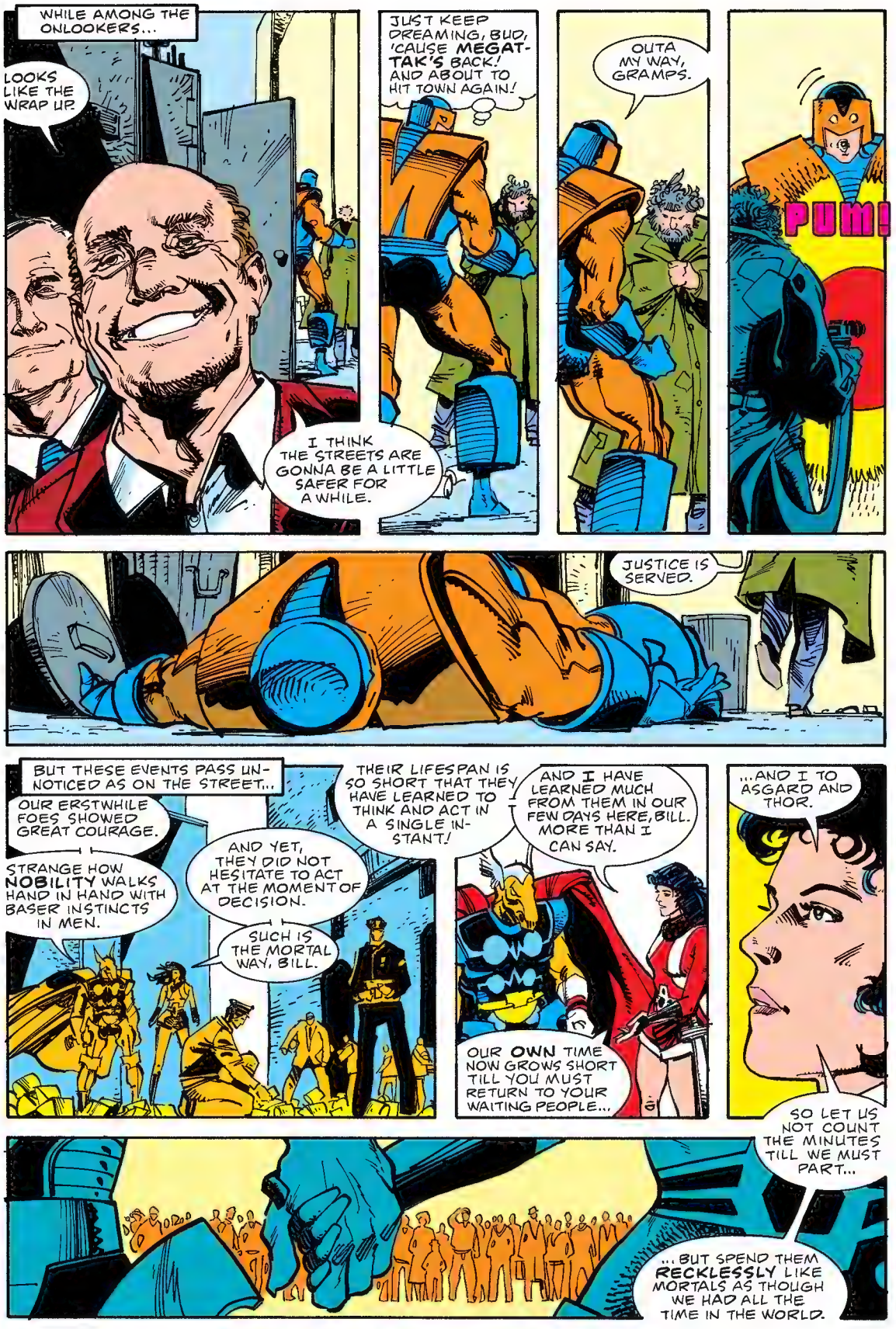

NEITHER DID I, CORPORAL BLUE.
WE MAY BE THIEVES, ROBBERS, AND CRIMINALS!
BUT, BY HEAVEN, WE'RE AMERICAN THIEVES, ROBBERS, AND CRIMINALS!

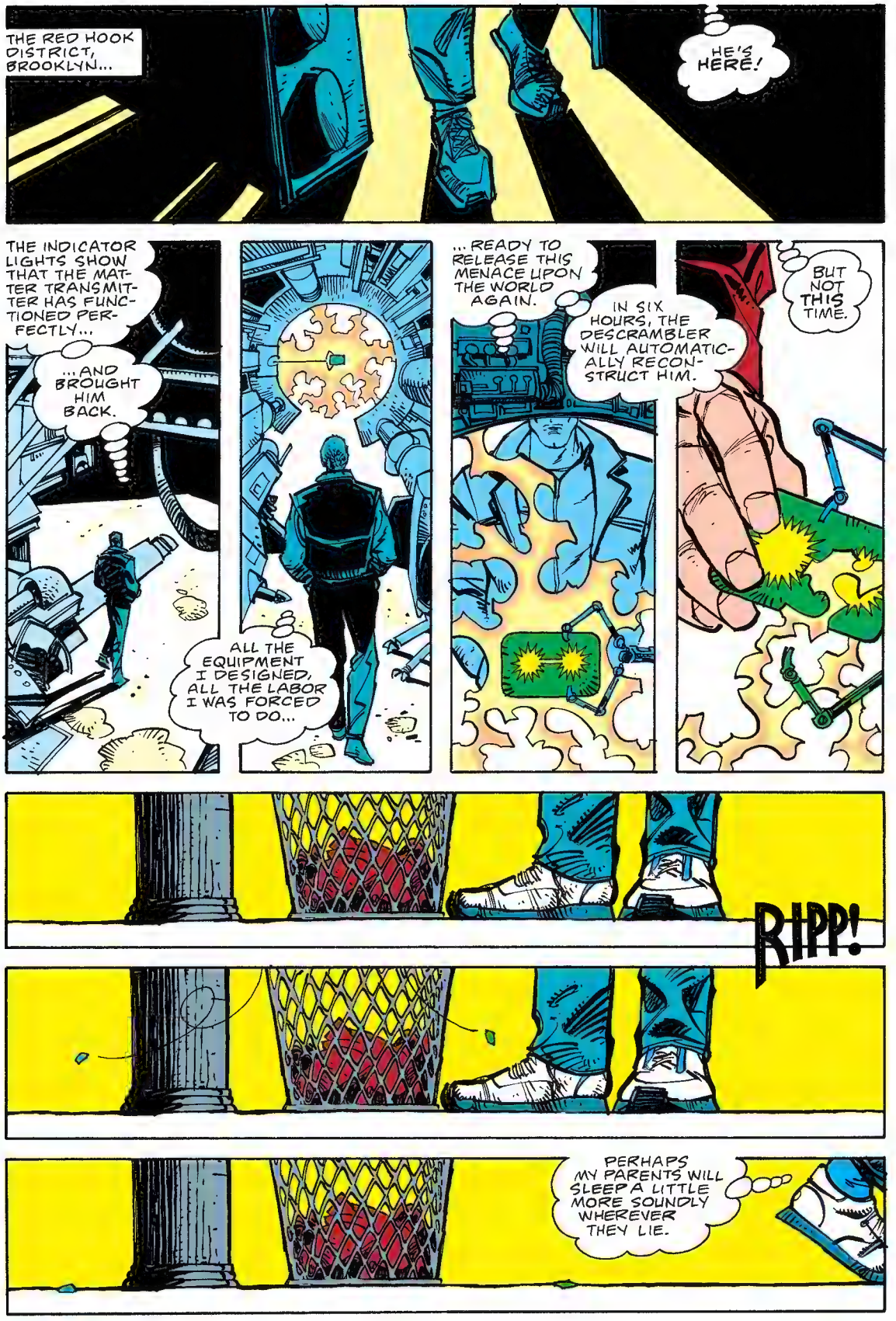

PRIVATE GREEN, WE'VE ONLY SECONDS LEFT.
GET BACK INTO THE FED AND DESTROY THE IMPULSER!
THE REST OF YOU MEN--

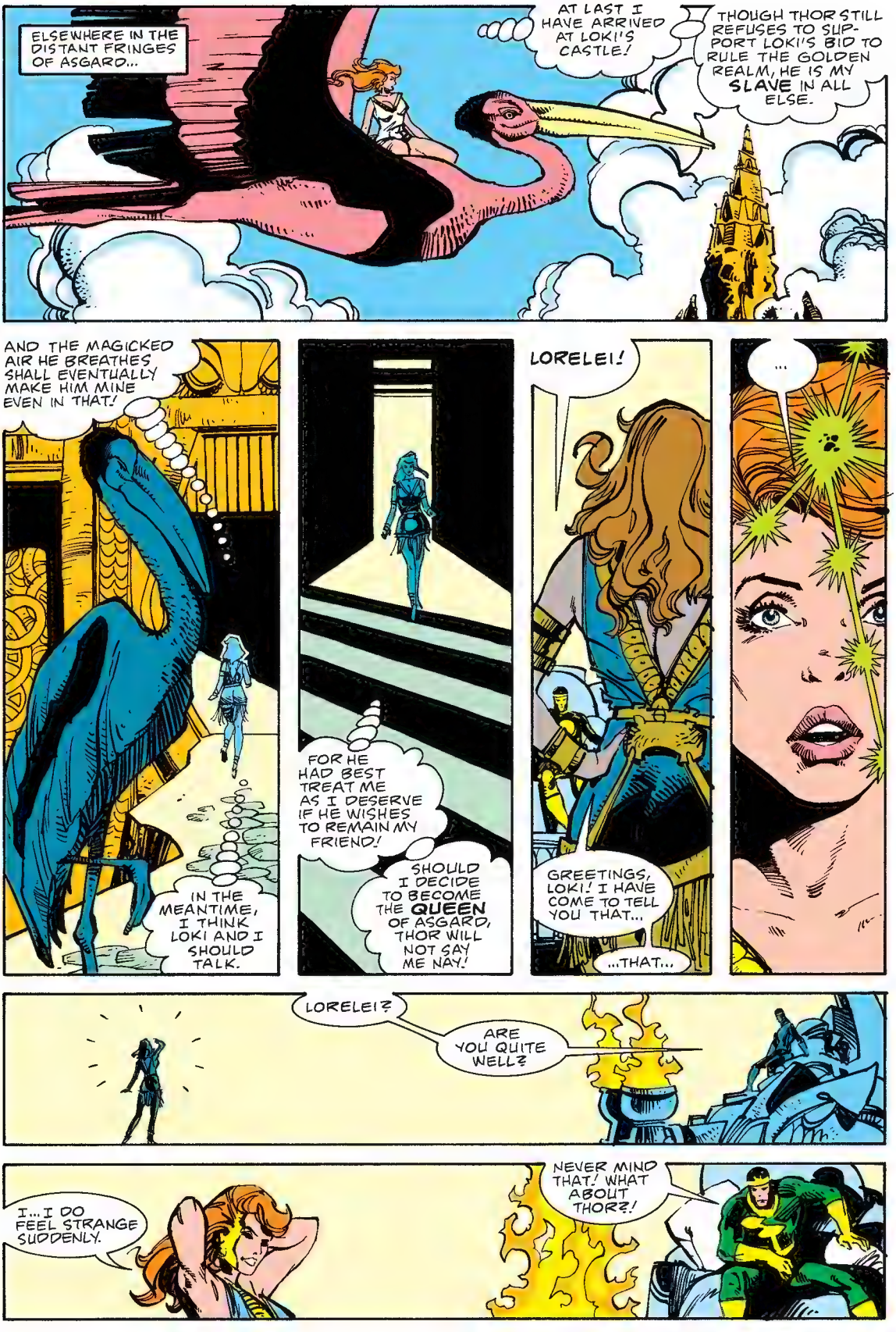

--FOLLOW ME!
WE'RE GOING TO SHOW THIS CREEP A LITTLE AMERICAN SOLIDARITY!
SMMGSHH!
THE GIANT'S MEN! THEY'VE TURNED AGAINST HIM!
GET LOST, HORSE FACE.
THIS IS OUR FIGHT NOW! WE'VE GOT A SCORE TO SETTLE!
FTSAPP!
BWANNGG!
WE BEEN WAITIN' FOR A CHANCE LIKE THIS EVER SINCE WE LEFT SAIGON!
AND THIS TIME WE AREN'T GONNA BLOW IT!
WHRANNGE!

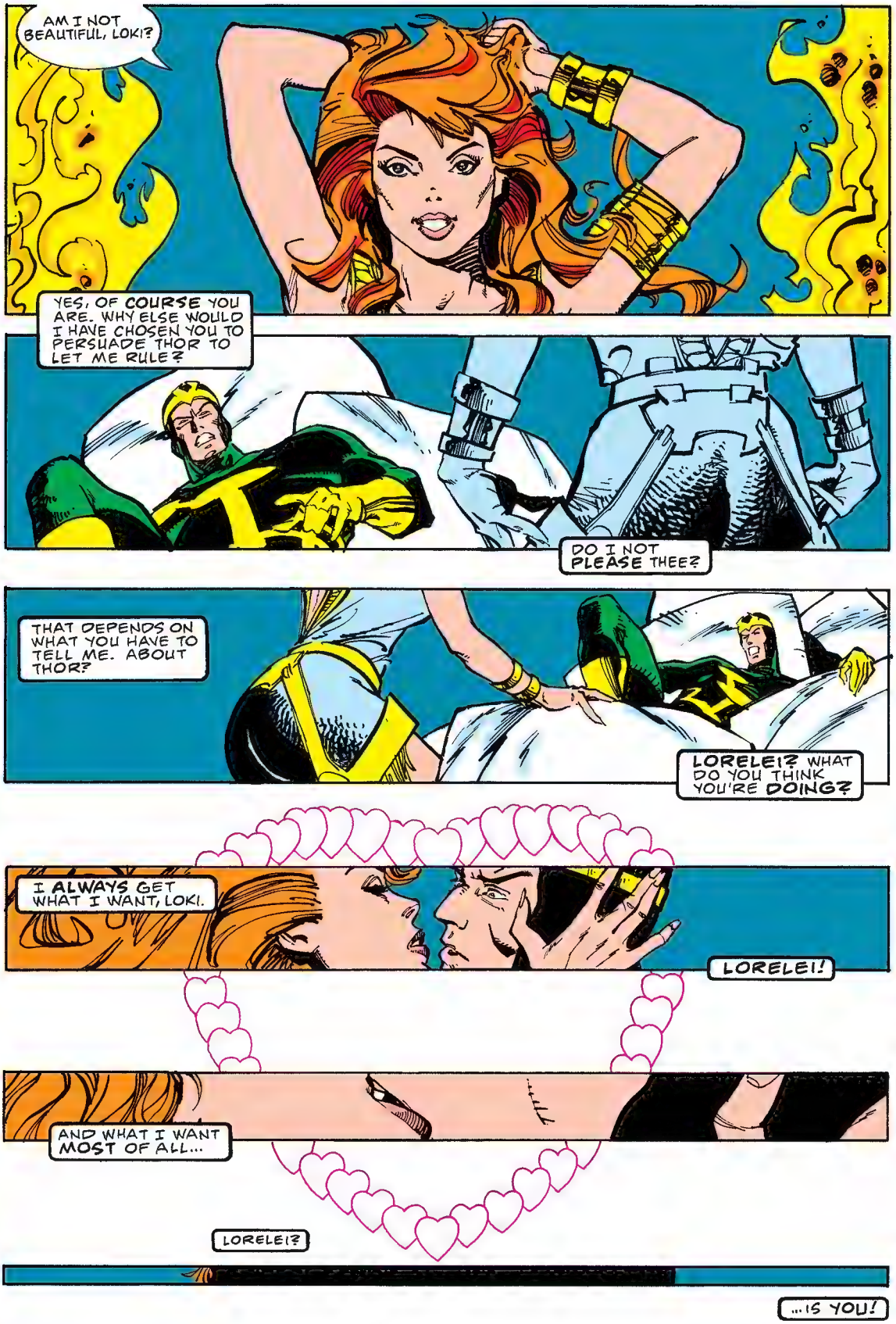
BILL, WHAT'S HAPPENING?
APPARENTLY, THE GIANT'S TRUE IDENTITY WAS UNKNOWN TO HIS MEN.
I SUSPECT THAT HE HAS PLAYED THEM FOR FOOLS!
PSST! HEY, YOU FOLKS. YOU SEEM TO BE FIGHTING ON THE SIDE OF THE ANGELS.
I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO TELL YOU.
WHILE ABOVE...
TRAITORS. I SHALL TEAR YOU LIMB FROM LIMB!
NOT A CHANCE, FOUR-EYES!
THERE ARE TOO MANY OF US AND THE ARMOR YOU GAVE US IS TOO GOOD!
WE'RE GONNA TAKE YOU APART PIECE BY--!
SHRAKK!
UGHH!!
CAPTAIN BLACK IS RIGHT! SERGEI HAS DONE HIS WORK TOO WELL. THEIR ARMOR IS SUPERB!
THOUGH INDIVIDUALLY I COULD DESTROY ANY OF THEM, THEY SWARM ABOUT ME LIKE FLIES!
AND SHOULD THEY BREACH MY SUIT'S PROTECTIVE ARMOR, THEY MIGHT EVEN SUCCEED IN DESTROYING ME.
BUT I HAVE ONE LAST TRICK THAT EVEN THEY ARE UNAWARE OF!
click!
AND SOON, THE TITANIUM MAN SHALL REPAY THEM FOR THIS INDIGNITY!
SKREEAKK!
HE'S VANISHED!

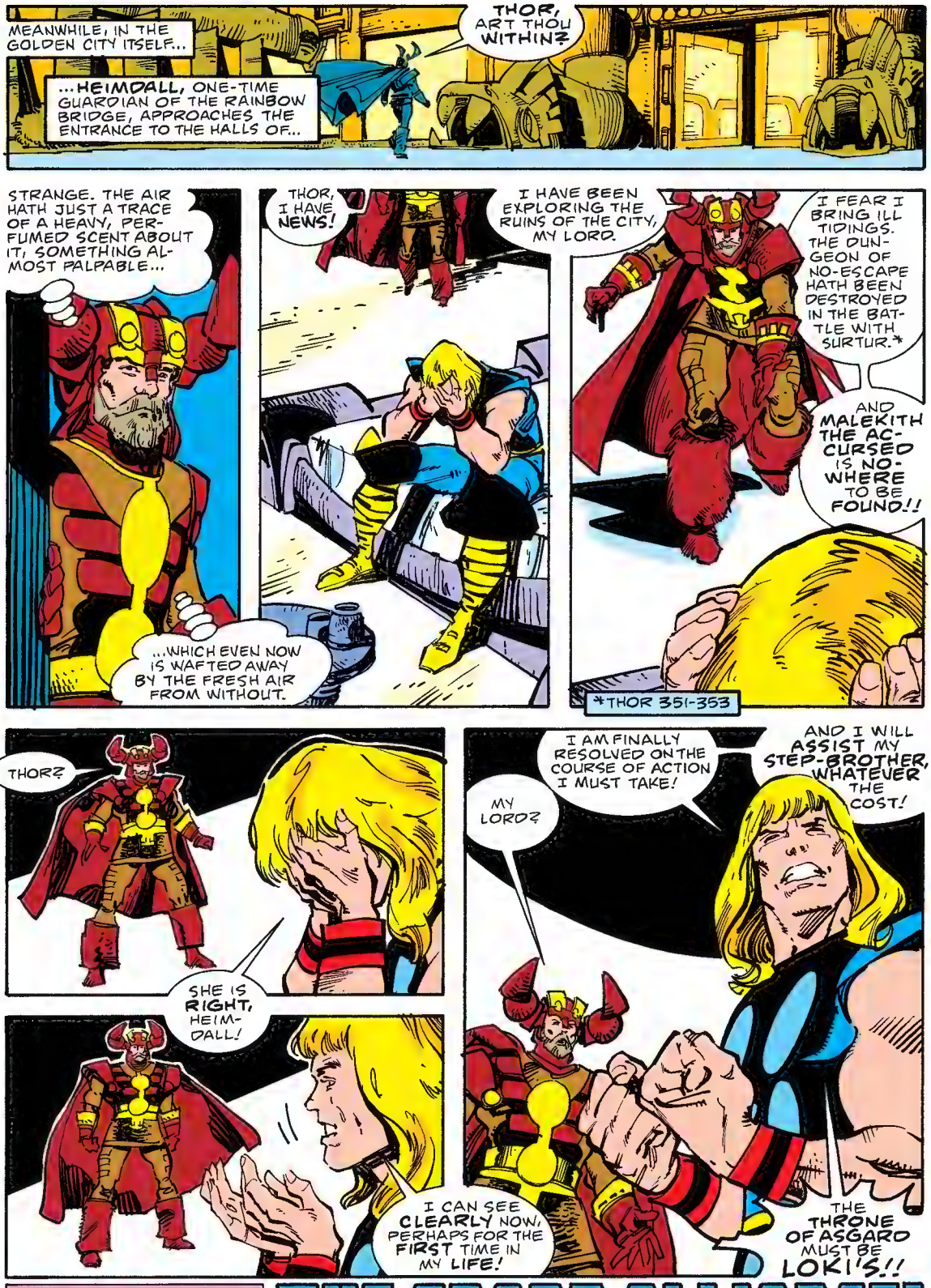

THEN LET'S GRAB THE GOLD AND VANISH, TOO!
WE CAN WORRY ABOUT HIM LATER!
HOWEVER, YOU CAN WORRY ABOUT ME RIGHT NOW!
HUH?
DON'T KID YOURSELF, HORSE FACE!
YOU CAN'T STOP US ALL. YOU SAW WHAT HAPPENED TO THE LAST GUY WHO TRIED.
INDEED I DID. BUT I KNOW YOUR SECRET NOW AND I HAVE A WEAPON HE DID NOT POSSESS.
DO YOU RECOGNIZE IT?
THE CONTROL MODULE!
PRECISELY! THE DEVICE THAT ACTIVATES YOUR TRANSFORMATION FROM ARMORED FIGHTING MEN TO TINY CARDS SPRINKLED ABOUT THE GROUND.
BUT I AM A FIGHTING MAN MYSELF AND I DEEM THAT YOU HAVE DONE AN HONORABLE DEED THIS DAY.
STILL, I CANNOT PERMIT YOU TO KEEP THE SUITS. IN YOUR HANDS, THEY ARE TOO DANGEROUS.
SO IN FIVE MINUTES, I WILL ACTIVATE THE CONTROLS AND THE SUITS WILL ONCE AGAIN BE REDUCED TO MERE CARDS.
AS WILL YOU BE IF YOU ARE STILL INSIDE THEM.
USE THE FIVE MINUTES WISELY, GENTLEMEN.
I AM LOATHE TO TAKE YOU PRISONERS.
YOU CALLED IT, MISTER.
IT DOES MAKE A MAN WONDER, THOUGH.
IF A HORSE-FACED ALIEN CAN FIGHT SO HARD FOR MY COUNTRY, MAYBE IT'S TIME TO RECONSIDER A FEW THINGS.
NO HARD FEELINGS ...AND THANKS.


WHILE AMONG THE ONLOOKERS...
LOOKS LIKE THE WRAP UP.
I THINK THE STREETS ARE GONNA BE A LITTLE SAFER FOR A WHILE.
JUST KEEP DREAMING, BUD, 'CAUSE MEGATAK'S BACK! AND ABOUT TO HIT TOWN AGAIN!
OUTTA MY WAY, GRAMPS.
PUM!
JUSTICE IS SERVED.
BUT THESE EVENTS PASS UNNOTICED AS ON THE STREET...
OUR ERSTWHILE FOES SHOWED GREAT COURAGE.
STRANGE HOW NOBILITY WALKS HAND IN HAND WITH BASER INSTINCTS IN MEN.
AND YET, THEY DID NOT HESITATE TO ACT AT THE MOMENT OF DECISION.
SUCH IS THE MORTAL WAY, BILL.
THEIR LIFESPAN IS SO SHORT THAT THEY HAVE LEARNED TO THINK AND ACT IN A SINGLE INSTANT!
AND I HAVE LEARNED MUCH FROM THEM IN OUR FEW DAYS HERE, BILL. MORE THAN I CAN SAY.
OUR OWN TIME NOW GROWS SHORT TILL YOU MUST RETURN TO YOUR WAITING PEOPLE...
...AND I TO ASGARD AND THOR.
SO LET US NOT COUNT THE MINUTES TILL WE MUST PART...
...BUT SPEND THEM RECKLESSLY LIKE MORTALS AS THOUGH WE HAD ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD.


THE RED HOOK DISTRICT, BROOKLYN...
HE'S HERE!
THE INDICATOR LIGHTS SHOW THAT THE MATTER TRANSMITTER HAS FUNCTIONED PERFECTLY...
...AND BROUGHT HIM BACK.
ALL THE EQUIPMENT I DESIGNED, ALL THE LABOR I WAS FORCED TO DO...
...READY TO RELEASE THIS MENACE UPON THE WORLD AGAIN.
IN SIX HOURS, THE DESCRAMBLER WILL AUTOMATICALLY RECONSTRUCT HIM.
BUT NOT THIS TIME.
RIPP!
PERHAPS MY PARENTS WILL SLEEP A LITTLE MORE SOUNDLY WHEREVER THEY LIE.


ELSEWHERE IN THE DISTANT FRINGES OF ASGARD...
AT LAST I HAVE ARRIVED AT LOKI'S CASTLE!
THOUGH THOR STILL REFUSES TO SUPPORT LOKI'S BID TO RULE THE GOLDEN REALM, HE IS MY SLAVE IN ALL ELSE.
AND THE MAGICKED AIR HE BREATHES SHALL EVENTUALLY MAKE HIM MINE EVEN IN THAT!
IN THE MEANTIME, I THINK LOKI AND I SHOULD TALK.
FOR HE HAD BEST TREAT ME AS I DESERVE IF HE WISHES TO REMAIN MY FRIEND!
SHOULD I DECIDE TO BECOME THE QUEEN OF ASGARD, THOR WILL NOT SAY ME NAY!
LORELEI!
GREETINGS, LOKI! I HAVE COME TO TELL YOU THAT...
...THAT...
...
LORELEI?
ARE YOU QUITE WELL?
I...I DO FEEL STRANGE SUDDENLY.
NEVER MIND THAT! WHAT ABOUT THOR?!


AM I NOT BEAUTIFUL, LOKI?
YES, OF COURSE YOU ARE. WHY ELSE WOULD I HAVE CHOSEN YOU TO PERSUADE THOR TO LET ME RULE?
DO I NOT PLEASE THEE?
THAT DEPENDS ON WHAT YOU HAVE TO TELL ME. ABOUT THOR?
LORELEI? WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?
I ALWAYS GET WHAT I WANT, LOKI.
LORELEI!
AND WHAT I WANT MOST OF ALL...
LORELEI?
...IS YOU!


MEANWHILE, IN THE GOLDEN CITY ITSELF...
...HEIMDALL, ONE-TIME GUARDIAN OF THE RAINBOW BRIDGE, APPROACHES THE ENTRANCE TO THE HALLS OF...
THOR, ART THOU WITHIN?
STRANGE. THE AIR HATH JUST A TRACE OF A HEAVY, PERFUMED SCENT ABOUT IT, SOMETHING ALMOST PALPABLE...
...WHICH EVEN NOW IS WAFTED AWAY BY THE FRESH AIR FROM WITHOUT.
THOR, I HAVE NEWS!
I HAVE BEEN EXPLORING THE RUINS OF THE CITY, MY LORD.
I FEAR I BRING ILL TIDINGS. THE DUNGEON OF NO-ESCAPE HATH BEEN DESTROYED IN THE BATTLE WITH SURTUR.*
AND MALEKITH THE ACCURSED IS NOWHERE TO BE FOUND!!
*THOR 351-353
THOR?
SHE IS RIGHT, HEIMDALL!
I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW, PERHAPS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE!
MY LORD?
I AM FINALLY RESOLVED ON THE COURSE OF ACTION I MUST TAKE!
AND I WILL ASSIST MY STEP-BROTHER, WHATEVER THE COST!
THE THRONE OF ASGARD MUST BE LOKI'S!!

NEXT: THE GRAND ALLIANCE!

THE STORY YOU **NEVER** THOUGHT YOU'D SEE--BUT CAN'T WAIT TO READ! (TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT!)

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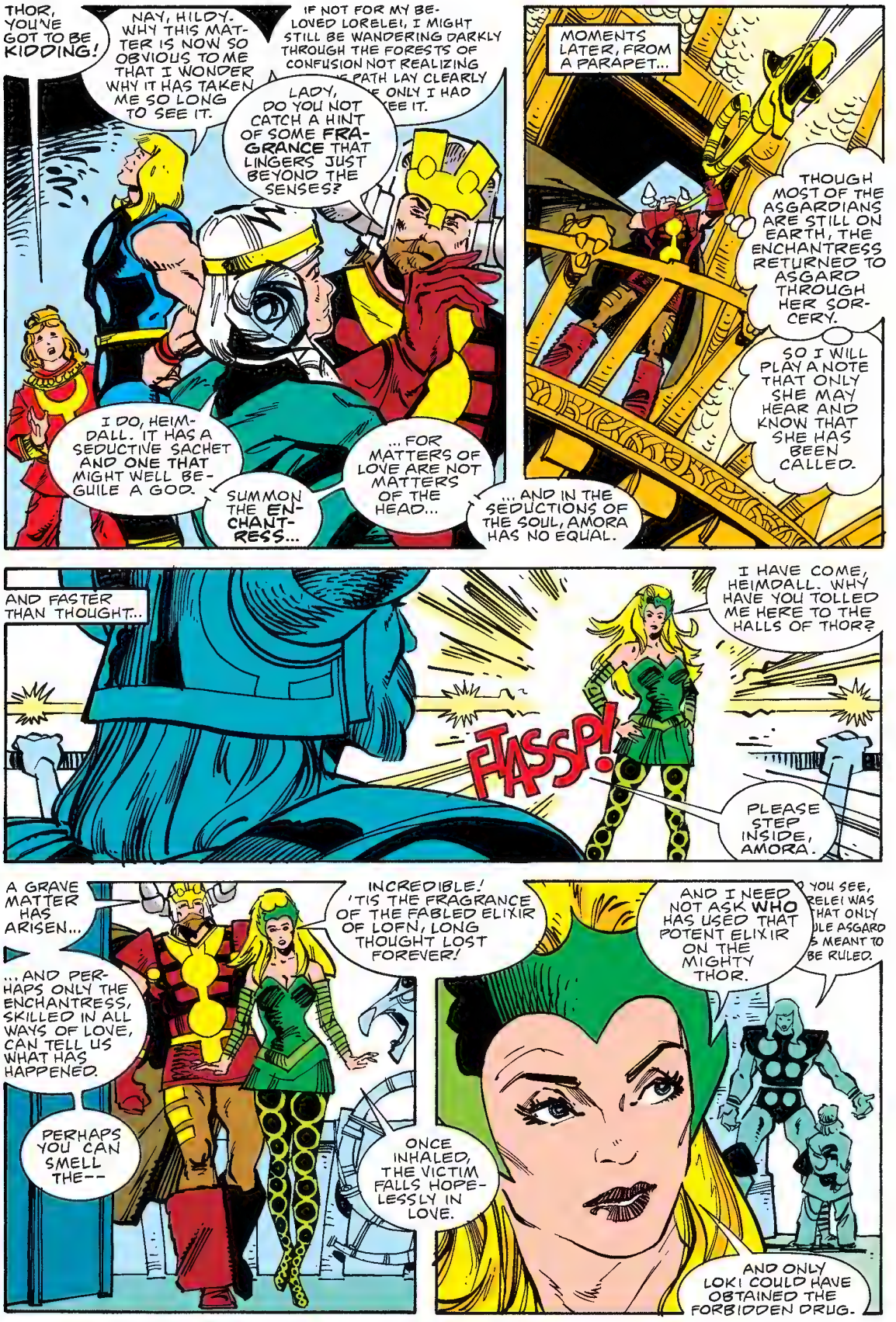
the mighty
THOR®
...IN THE SERVICE OF LOKI!

STAN LEE PRESENTS: the MIGHTY THOR®

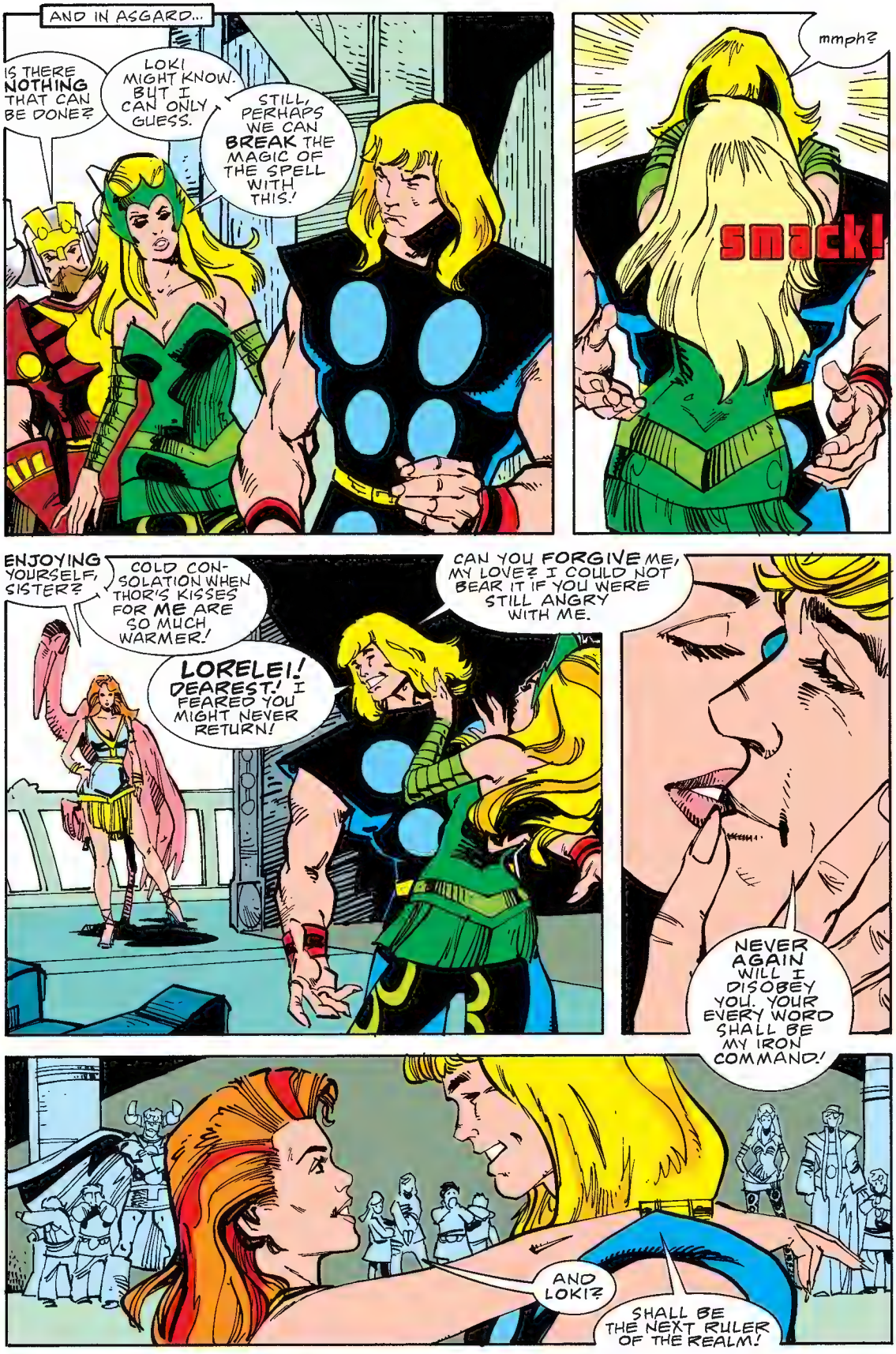
NO SUMMARY OF OURS WILL SUFFICE TO DESCRIBE THE UNBELIEVABLE TURN OF EVENTS TAKING PLACE BEFORE US...
...SO JUST HANG ON AS WE RUSH HEADLONG TOWARD A SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE DESTINY FOR ASGARD, HOME OF THE MIGHTY NORSE GODS, WITH A TALE THAT CAN ONLY BE CALLED...
THE GRAND ALLIANCE!
OR LIFE WITH LOKI!!!
MY STEP-BROTHER'S TIME HAS COME AT LAST! LOKI MUST BE KING!

ART AND STORY: WALTER SIMONSON - LETTERING: JOHN WORKMAN, JR. - COLORING: CHRISTIE SCHEELE
EDITING: RALPH MACCHIO - EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: JIM SHOOTER

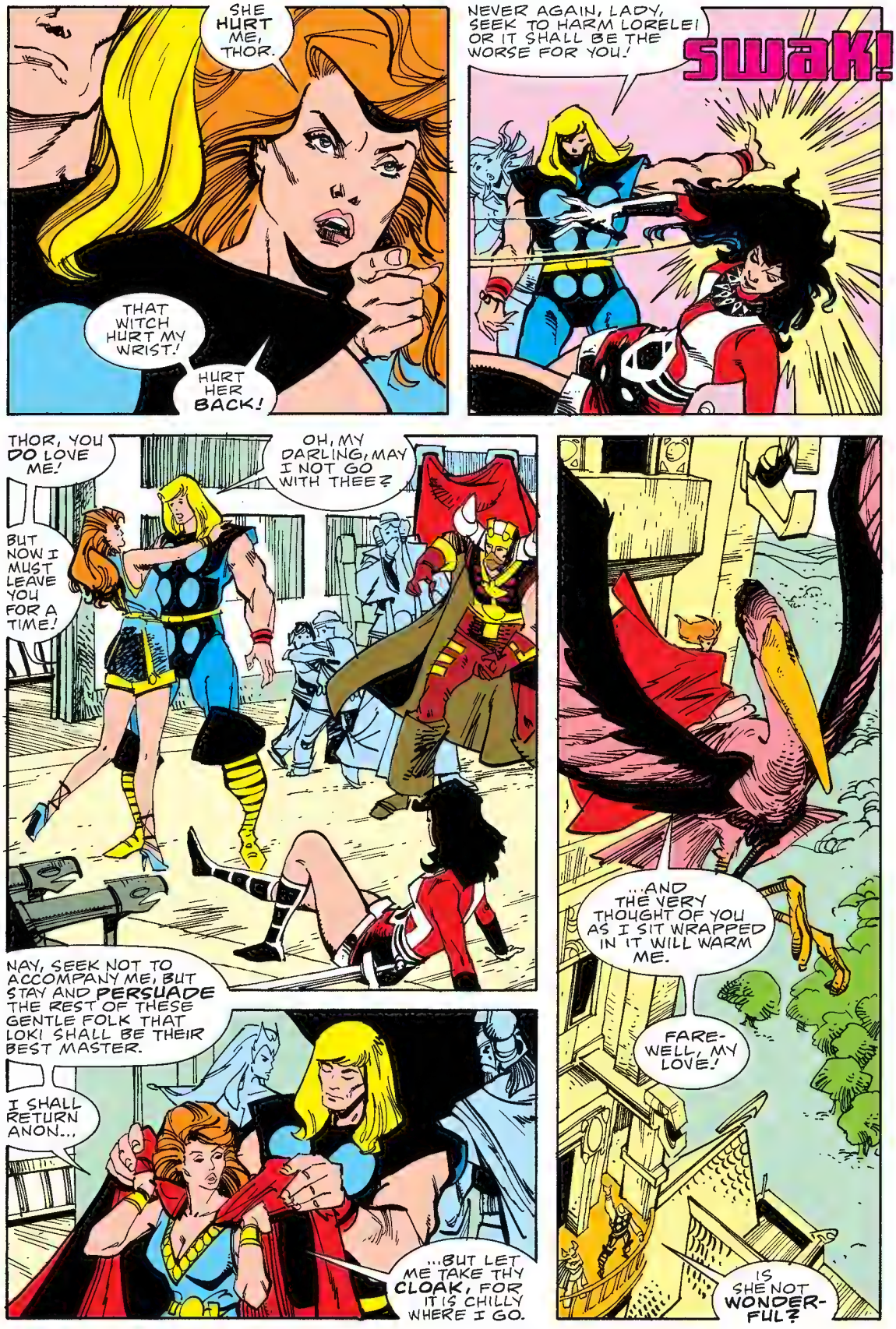
THOR! SURELY THIS IDEA IS THE VERY SOUL OF MADNESS!
THY BROTHER HAS EVER COVETED THE THRONE OF THE GOLDEN REALM...
...AND EVER HAS HE STRIVEN TO DESTROY ALL THAT IS GOOD AND NOBLE IN ASGARD!
NAY, GOOD HEIMDALL.
FOR LORELEI, MY BELOVED, HAS SHOWN ME THAT MY STEP-BROTHER WOULD BE THE PERFECT RULER OF THE PERFECT REALM!
THOUGH IT IS THY GIFT TO SEE AND HEAR ALL THINGS THAT PASS, IN THIS MY OWN EYES SEE MORE CLEARLY.
AND AS HER WORD IS LAW TO ME NOW...
...SO SHALL I SUPPORT LOKI'S RELUCTANT WISH TO BECOME THE LORD OF THIS BLESSED KINGDOM!
I HAD BEST SUMMON HELP! LORELEI HAS BEWITCHED THOR'S SENSES AND UNLESS WE CAN UNDO THIS ENCHANTMENT...
...ASGARD IS DOOMED TO BE RULED BY ONE WHOSE EVIL CAN SNUFF OUT THE VERY SUN!
AND SHORTLY THEREAFTER...
'TIS AS I HAVE TOLD YOU, LADY FRIGGA.
THY STEPSON IS BESOTTED WITH LOVE OF LORELEI AND SPEAKS OF NOTHING BUT SETTING LOKI UPON THE THRONE.
IF WE CANNOT BREAK HIS ENTHRALLMENT, THE GOLDEN REALM MAY BE DOOMED.
WELCOME, LADY. NO DOUBT THE NOBLE HEIMDALL HAS SPOKEN OF MY FIRM RESOLVE TO AID LOKI TO BECOME OUR LIEGE...
...AND YOU HAVE COME TO TELL ME THAT YOU, TOO, SEE THE WISDOM OF THIS COURSE OF ACTION.
I HAVE INDEED COME TO HEAR THESE WORDS FROM THINE OWN LIPS, THOR.
snif
snif

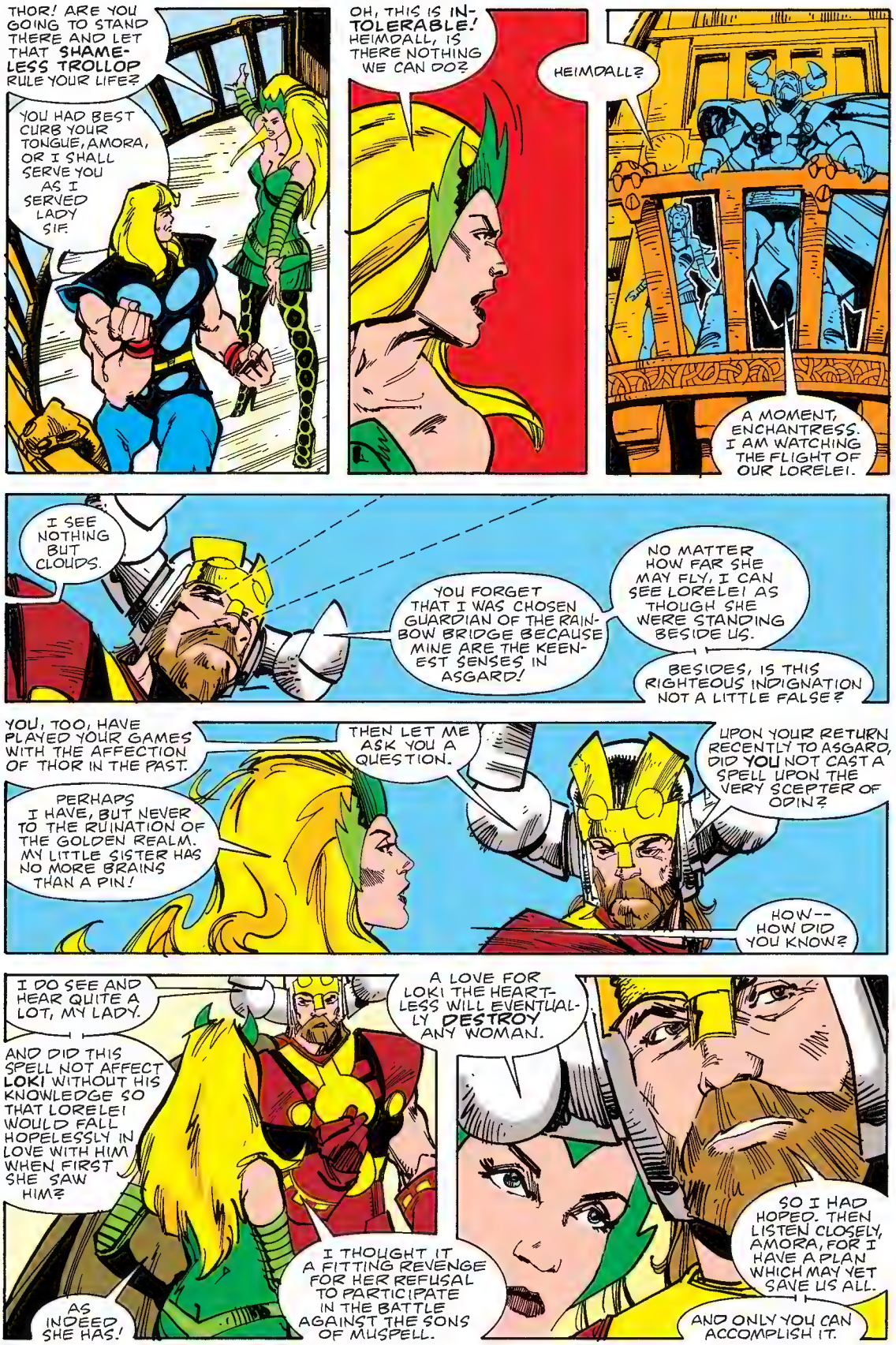

THOR, YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING!
NAY, HILDY. WHY THIS MATTER IS NOW SO OBVIOUS TO ME THAT I WONDER WHY IT HAS TAKEN ME SO LONG TO SEE IT.
IF NOT FOR MY BELOVED LORELEI, I MIGHT STILL BE WANDERING DARKLY THROUGH THE FORESTS OF CONFUSION NOT REALIZING
LADY, DO YOU NOT CATCH A HINT OF SOME FRAGRANCE THAT LINGERS JUST BEYOND THE SENSES?
I DO, HEIMDALL. IT HAS A SEDUCTIVE SACHET AND ONE THAT MIGHT WELL BEGUILE A GOD.
SUMMON THE ENCHANTRESS...
...FOR MATTERS OF LOVE ARE NOT MATTERS OF THE HEAD...
...AND IN THE SEDUCTIONS OF THE SOUL, AMORA HAS NO EQUAL.
MOMENTS LATER, FROM A PARAPET...
THOUGH MOST OF THE ASGARDIANS ARE STILL ON EARTH, THE ENCHANTRESS RETURNED TO ASGARD THROUGH HER SORCERY.
SO I WILL PLAY A NOTE THAT ONLY SHE MAY HEAR AND KNOW THAT SHE HAS BEEN CALLED.
AND FASTER THAN THOUGHT...
FTASSP!
I HAVE COME, HEIMDALL. WHY HAVE YOU TOLLED ME HERE TO THE HALLS OF THOR?
PLEASE STEP INSIDE, AMORA.
A GRAVE MATTER HAS ARISEN...
...AND PERHAPS ONLY THE ENCHANTRESS, SKILLED IN ALL WAYS OF LOVE, CAN TELL US WHAT HAS HAPPENED.
PERHAPS YOU CAN SMELL THE--
INCREDIBLE! 'TIS THE FRAGRANCE OF THE FABLED ELIXIR OF LOFN, LONG THOUGHT LOST FOREVER!
ONCE INHALED, THE VICTIM FALLS HOPELESSLY IN LOVE.
AND I NEED NOT ASK WHO HAS USED THAT POTENT ELIXIR ON THE MIGHTY THOR.
AND ONLY LOKI COULD HAVE OBTAINED THE FORBIDDEN DRUG.

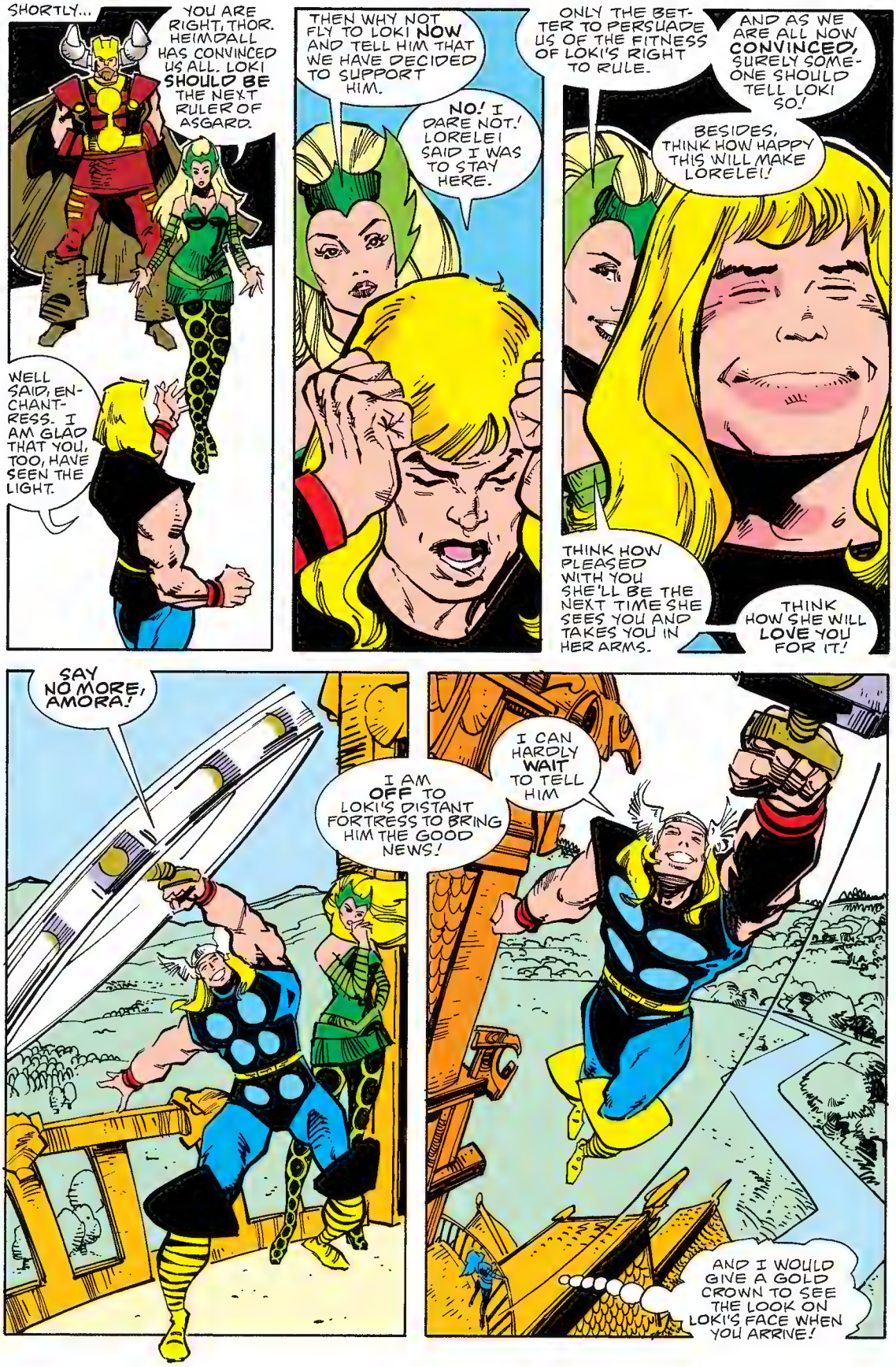
AND AS THOR CONTINUES TO EXPOUND (ENDLESSLY) ON THE VIRTUES OF HIS STEP-BROTHER...
... IN MANHATTAN, BETA RAY BILL AND SIF WANDER SLOWLY ALONG COLUMBUS AVENUE.
THE WORD HAS GONE OUT TO ALL OUR FORCES, BILL, TO GATHER AGAIN IN CENTRAL PARK.
Florist
FOR I KNOW HOW TO RETURN THEM HOME AND I MUST SPEAK WITH THOR.
IN A FEW SHORT MOMENTS, I SHALL DEPART.
AND WE SHALL NOT SHARE THIS MOMENT OF PRIVACY AGAIN.
OUR TIME TOGETHER IS NEARLY GONE.
NOT SO, MI-LADY.
THE TIMES WE HAVE HAD TOGETHER WILL REMAIN WITH US FOREVER.
THE PASSING MINUTES, THE DISTANT YEARS, SHALL NOT DIMINISH THE GLORY OF THESE FEW MOMENTS.
AND THE GIFTS YOU HAVE GIVEN ME WITH THOSE MOMENTS ARE PEARLS BEYOND PRICE.
OH, DO NOT SAY SO, BILL.
FOR YOU HAVE GIVEN ME SO MUCH AND YET I MUST ASK FOR THE MOST PRICELESS GIFT OF ALL... MY FREEDOM.
THAT, MY LADY, IS ALL I HAVE LEFT TO GIVE.
THEN TAKE THESE FLOWERS AS MY TOKEN AND TURN AWAY, BILL.
FOR I DO NOT THINK THAT I COULD BEAR TO LEAVE YOU WHILE YOU ARE WATCHING ME.
AND IN THE GATHERING TWILIGHT, THE GODDESS SIF OF ASGARD TAKES HER LEAVE AND NO EYES WATCH AS SHE DEPARTS...

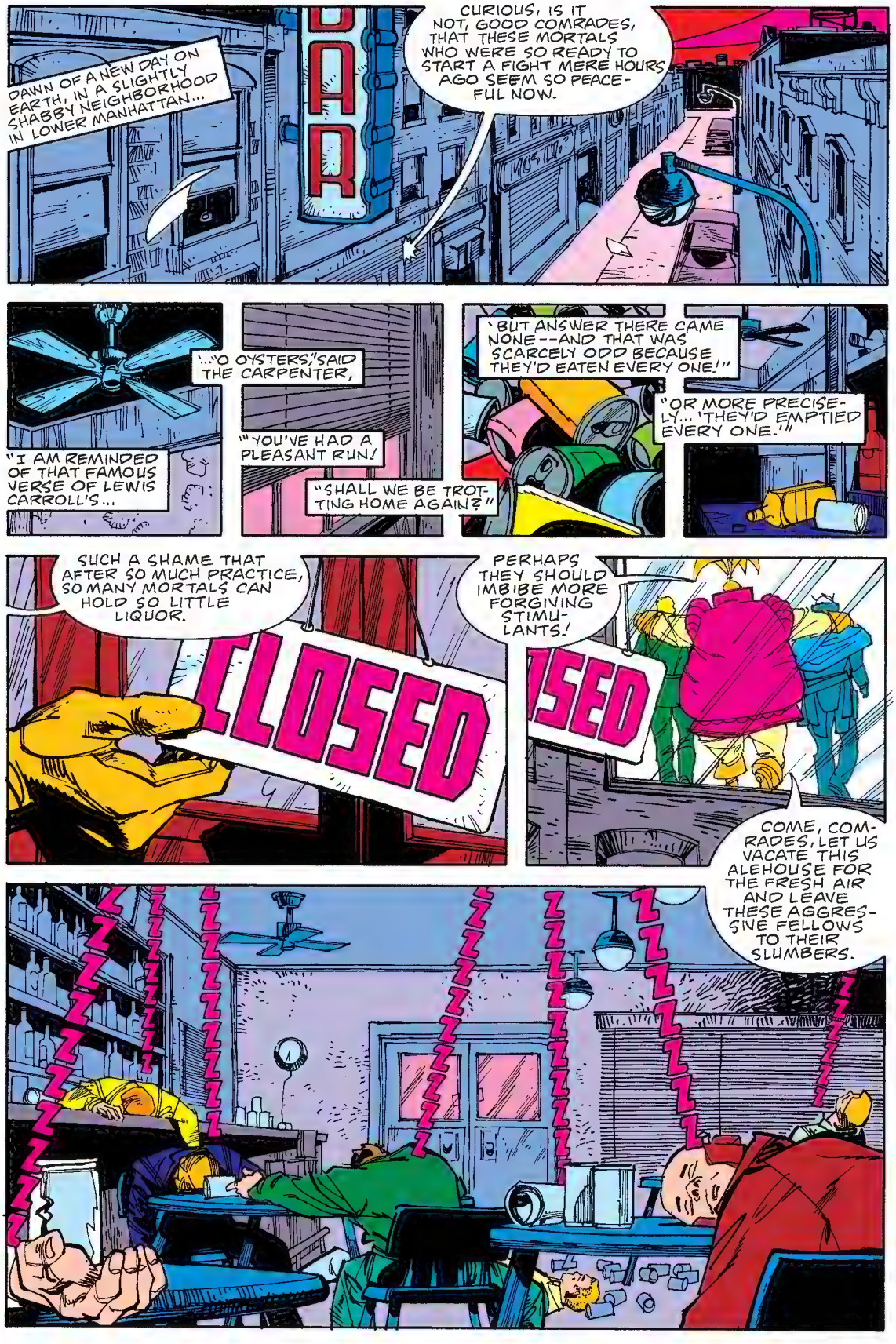

AND IN ASGARD...
IS THERE NOTHING THAT CAN BE DONE?
LOKI MIGHT KNOW. BUT I CAN ONLY GUESS.
STILL, PERHAPS WE CAN BREAK THE MAGIC OF THE SPELL WITH THIS!
mmph?
smack!
ENJOYING YOURSELF, SISTER?
COLD CONSOLATION WHEN THOR'S KISSES FOR ME ARE SO MUCH WARMER!
LORELEI! DEAREST! I FEARED YOU MIGHT NEVER RETURN!
CAN YOU FORGIVE ME, MY LOVE? I COULD NOT BEAR IT IF YOU WERE STILL ANGRY WITH ME.
NEVER AGAIN WILL I DISOBEY YOU. YOUR EVERY WORD SHALL BE MY IRON COMMAND!
AND LOKI?
SHALL BE THE NEXT RULER OF THE REALM!

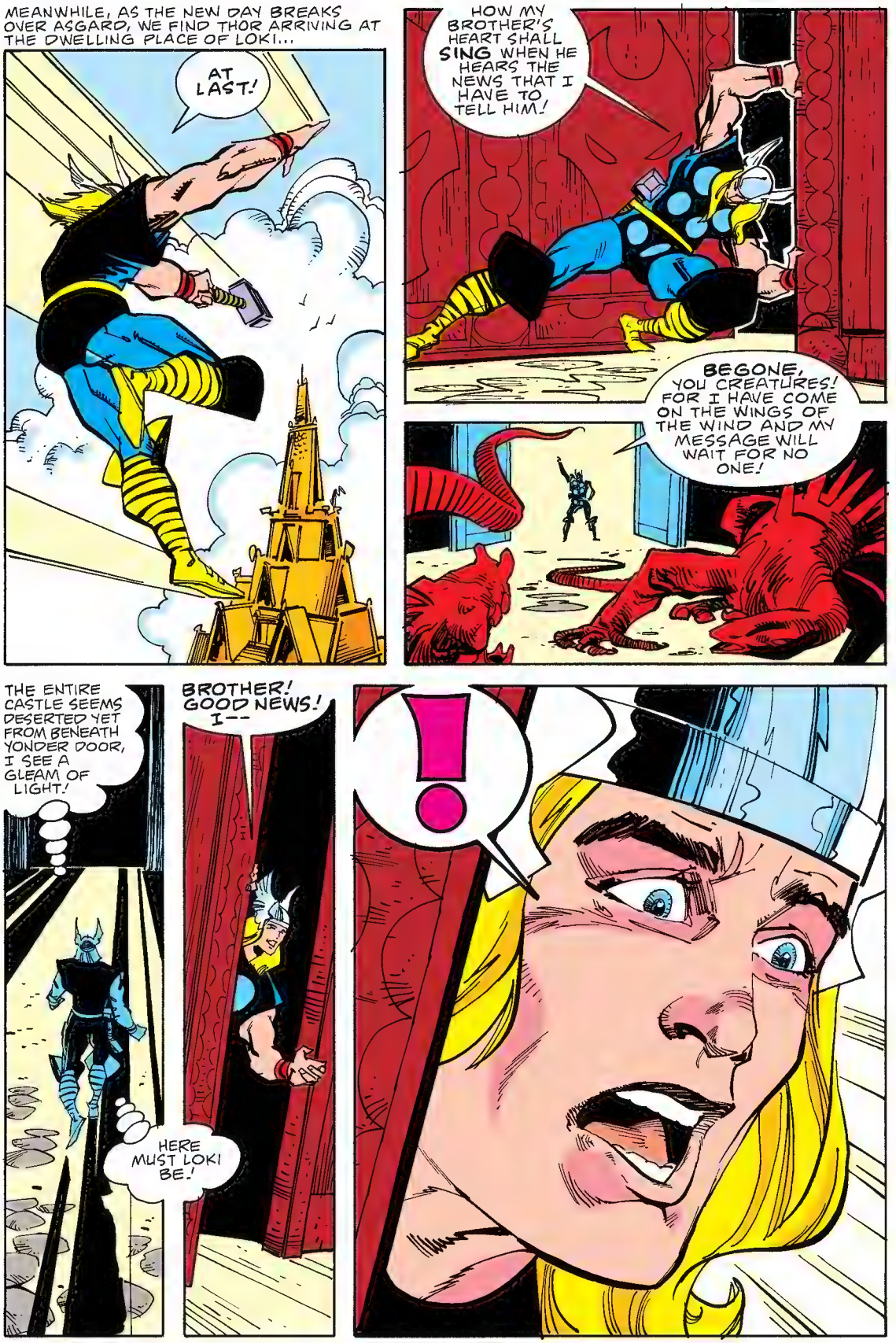
BUT AT THAT MOMENT, BEFORE THE ASTONISHED ASGARDIANS CAN GATHER THEIR WITS ABOUT THEM...
SWROOOSHH!
LADY SIF! YOU HAVE COME JUST IN TIME!
WHY? WHAT HAS HAPPENED?
LORELEI HAS WROUGHT A MAGIC SO POWERFUL THAT THOR IS HER SLAVE, BODY AND SOUL...
...AND AT HER BIDDING, HE WILL STOP AT NOTHING TO PLACE LOKI UPON THE GOLDEN THRONE OF ASGARD!
YOU HAVE DONE THAT?!!
RELEASE HIM, GIRL, OR YOU SHALL HAVE CAUSE TO REGRET IT!!
OWW! YOU'RE HURTING ME!
STAND OFF, LADY SIF.
FOR LORELEI IS UNDER MY PROTECTION AND THOSE WHO WOULD INJURE HER DO SO AT THE RISK OF MY DISPLEASURE.


SHE HURT ME, THOR.
THAT WITCH HURT MY WRIST!
HURT HER BACK!
NEVER AGAIN, LADY, SEEK TO HARM LORELEI OR IT SHALL BE THE WORSE FOR YOU!
SWAK!
THOR, YOU DO LOVE ME!
OH, MY DARLING, MAY I NOT GO WITH THEE?
BUT NOW I MUST LEAVE YOU FOR A TIME!
NAY, SEEK NOT TO ACCOMPANY ME, BUT STAY AND PERSUADE THE REST OF THESE GENTLE FOLK THAT LOKI SHALL BE THEIR BEST MASTER.
I SHALL RETURN ANON...
...BUT LET ME TAKE THY CLOAK, FOR IT IS CHILLY WHERE I GO.
...AND THE VERY THOUGHT OF YOU AS I SIT WRAPPED IN IT WILL WARM ME.
FARE-WELL, MY LOVE!
IS SHE NOT WONDER-FUL?

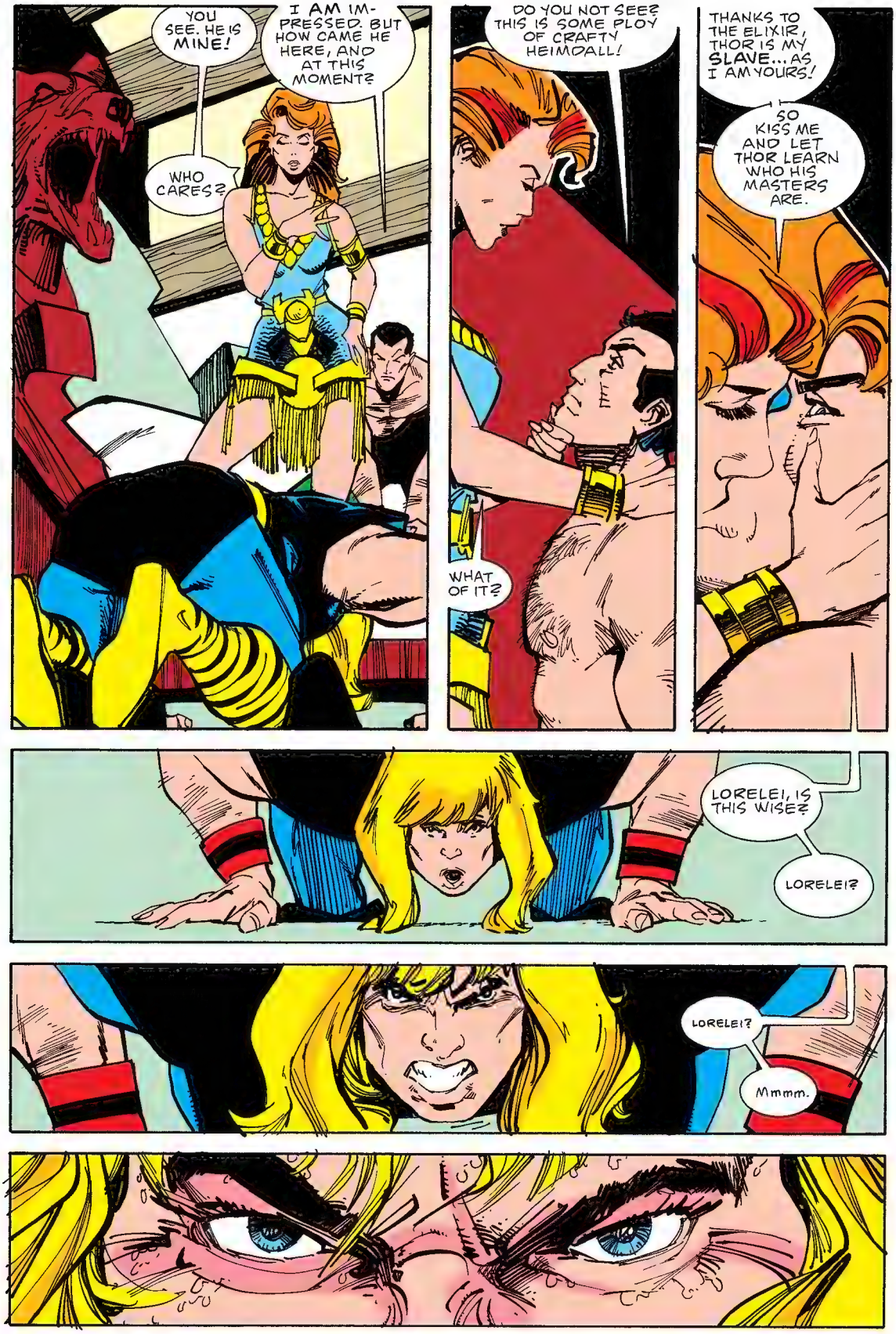

THOR! ARE YOU GOING TO STAND THERE AND LET THAT SHAMELESS TROLLOP RULE YOUR LIFE?
YOU HAD BEST CURB YOUR TONGUE, AMORA, OR I SHALL SERVE YOU AS I SERVED LADY SIF.
OH, THIS IS INTOLERABLE! HEIMDALL, IS THERE NOTHING WE CAN DO?
HEIMDALL?
A MOMENT, ENCHANTRESS. I AM WATCHING THE FLIGHT OF OUR LORELEI.
I SEE NOTHING BUT CLOUDS.
YOU FORGET THAT I WAS CHOSEN GUARDIAN OF THE RAINBOW BRIDGE BECAUSE MINE ARE THE KEENEST SENSES IN ASGARD!
NO MATTER HOW FAR SHE MAY FLY, I CAN SEE LORELEI AS THOUGH SHE WERE STANDING BESIDE US.
BESIDES, IS THIS RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION NOT A LITTLE FALSE?
YOU, TOO, HAVE PLAYED YOUR GAMES WITH THE AFFECTION OF THOR IN THE PAST.
PERHAPS I HAVE, BUT NEVER TO THE RUINATION OF THE GOLDEN REALM. MY LITTLE SISTER HAS NO MORE BRAINS THAN A PIN!
THEN LET ME ASK YOU A QUESTION.
UPON YOUR RETURN RECENTLY TO ASGARD, DID YOU NOT CAST A SPELL UPON THE VERY SCEPTER OF ODIN?
HOW-- HOW DID YOU KNOW?
I DO SEE AND HEAR QUITE A LOT, MY LADY.
AND DID THIS SPELL NOT AFFECT LOKI WITHOUT HIS KNOWLEDGE SO THAT LORELEI WOULD FALL HOPELESSLY IN LOVE WITH HIM WHEN FIRST SHE SAW HIM?
AS INDEED SHE HAS!
A LOVE FOR LOKI THE HEARTLESS WILL EVENTUALLY DESTROY ANY WOMAN.
I THOUGHT IT A FITTING REVENGE FOR HER REFUSAL TO PARTICIPATE IN THE BATTLE AGAINST THE SONS OF MUSPELL.
SO I HAD HOPED. THEN LISTEN CLOSELY, AMORA, FOR I HAVE A PLAN WHICH MAY YET SAVE US ALL.
AND ONLY YOU CAN ACCOMPLISH IT.

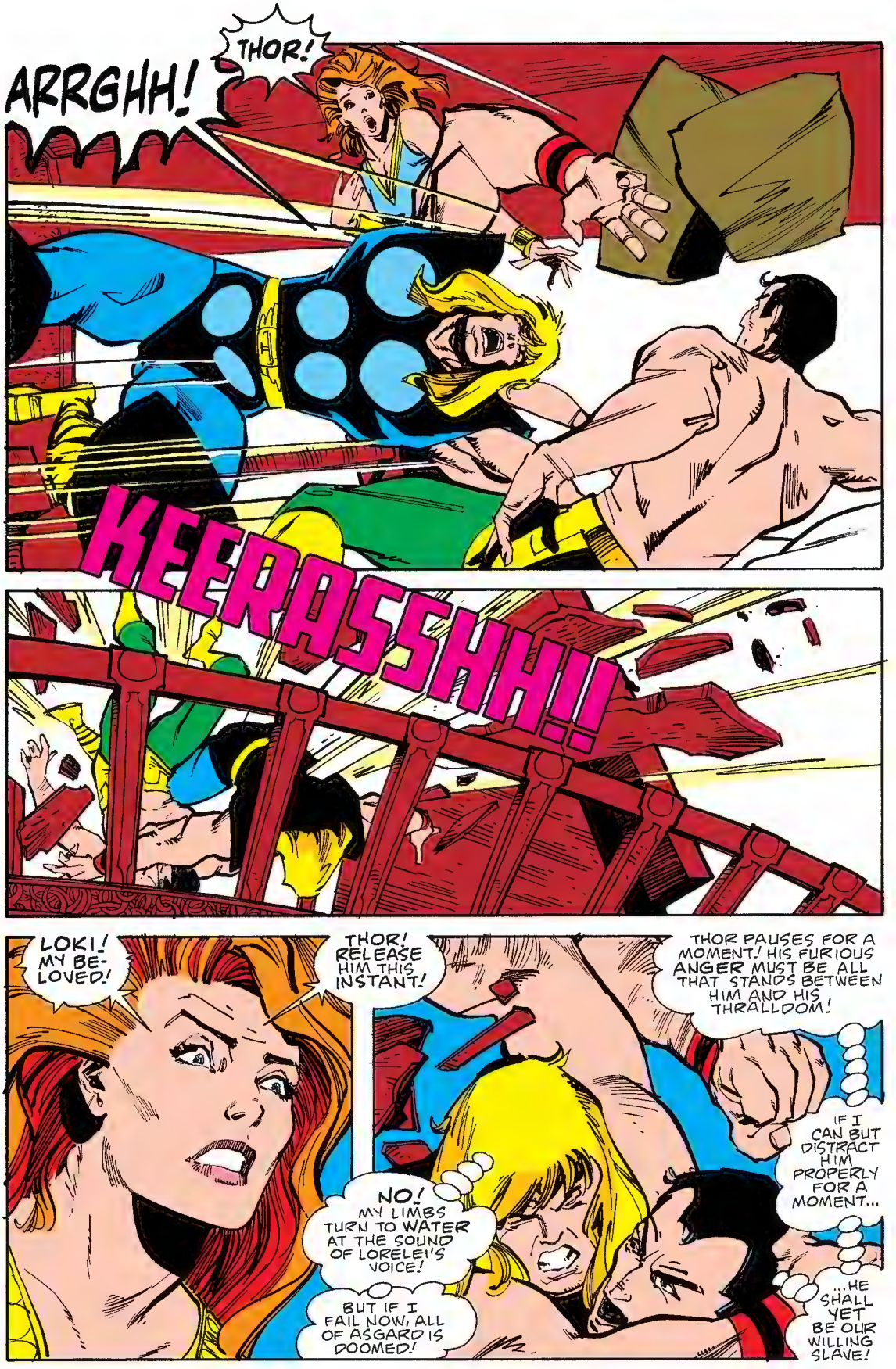

SHORTLY...
YOU ARE RIGHT, THOR. HEIMDALL HAS CONVINCED US ALL. LOKI **SHOULD BE** THE NEXT RULER OF ASGARD.
WELL SAID, ENCHANTRESS. I AM GLAD THAT YOU, TOO, HAVE SEEN THE LIGHT.
THEN WHY NOT FLY TO LOKI **NOW** AND TELL HIM THAT WE HAVE DECIDED TO SUPPORT HIM.
NO! I DARE NOT! LORELEI SAID I WAS TO STAY HERE.
ONLY THE BETTER TO PERSUADE US OF THE FITNESS OF LOKI'S RIGHT TO RULE.
AND AS WE ARE ALL NOW **CONVINCED**, SURELY SOMEONE SHOULD TELL LOKI SO!
BESIDES, THINK HOW HAPPY THIS WILL MAKE LORELEI!
THINK HOW PLEASED WITH YOU SHE'LL BE THE NEXT TIME SHE SEES YOU AND TAKES YOU IN HER ARMS.
THINK HOW SHE WILL **LOVE** YOU FOR IT!
SAY NO MORE, AMORA!
I AM **OFF** TO LOKI'S DISTANT FORTRESS TO BRING HIM THE GOOD NEWS!
I CAN HARDLY **WAIT** TO TELL HIM
AND I WOULD GIVE A GOLD CROWN TO SEE THE LOOK ON LOKI'S FACE WHEN YOU ARRIVE!

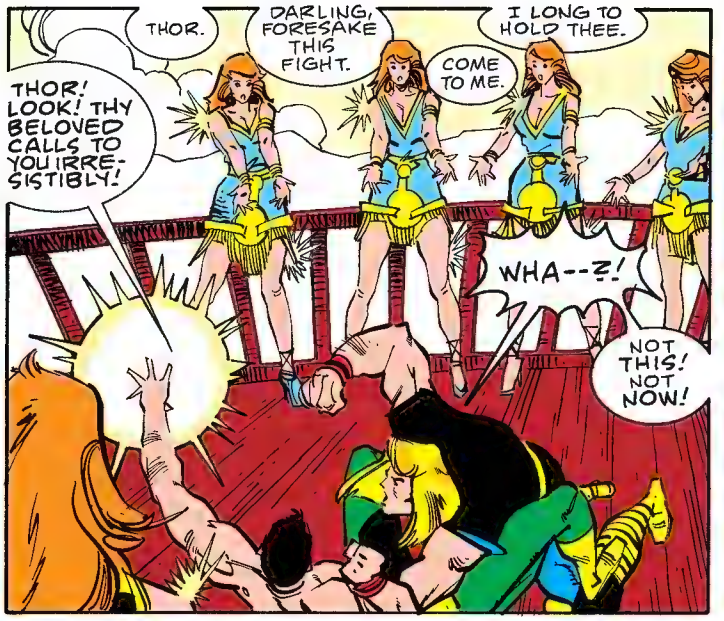

DAWN OF A NEW DAY ON EARTH, IN A SLIGHTLY SHABBY NEIGHBORHOOD IN LOWER MANHATTAN...
BAR
CURIOUS, IS IT NOT, GOOD COMRADES, THAT THESE MORTALS WHO WERE SO READY TO START A FIGHT MERE HOURS AGO SEEM SO PEACEFUL NOW.
"I AM REMINDED OF THAT FAMOUS VERSE OF LEWIS CARROLL'S...
"...'O OYSTERS,' SAID THE CARPENTER,
"'YOU'VE HAD A PLEASANT RUN!
"SHALL WE BE TROTTING HOME AGAIN?"
'BUT ANSWER THERE CAME NONE--AND THAT WAS SCARCELY ODD BECAUSE THEY'D EATEN EVERY ONE!'"
"OR MORE PRECISELY... 'THEY'D EMPTIED EVERY ONE.'"
SUCH A SHAME THAT AFTER SO MUCH PRACTICE, SO MANY MORTALS CAN HOLD SO LITTLE LIQUOR.
CLOSED
PERHAPS THEY SHOULD IMBIBE MORE FORGIVING STIMULANTS!
SED
COME, COMRADES, LET US VACATE THIS ALEHOUSE FOR THE FRESH AIR AND LEAVE THESE AGGRESSIVE FELLOWS TO THEIR SLUMBERS.


MEANWHILE, AS THE NEW DAY BREAKS OVER ASGARD, WE FIND THOR ARRIVING AT THE DWELLING PLACE OF LOKI...
AT LAST!
HOW MY BROTHER'S HEART SHALL SING WHEN HE HEARS THE NEWS THAT I HAVE TO TELL HIM!
BEGONE, YOU CREATURES! FOR I HAVE COME ON THE WINGS OF THE WIND AND MY MESSAGE WILL WAIT FOR NO ONE!
THE ENTIRE CASTLE SEEMS DESERTED YET FROM BENEATH YONDER DOOR, I SEE A GLEAM OF LIGHT!
BROTHER! GOOD NEWS! I--
HERE MUST LOKI BE!
!

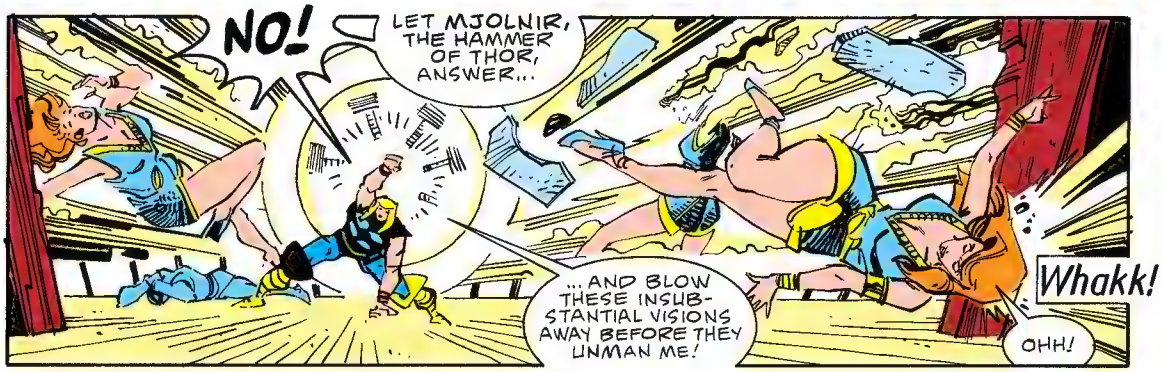
LORELEI AND LOKI!
THOR!
UNHAND HER, THOU BASE VILLAIN!
WAIT, THOR! LOOK AT ME!
CAN YOU NOT SENSE THE HEAT OF MY HANDS UPON YOU?
DO YOU NOT FEEL THE PASSION STREAMING BETWEEN OUR BODIES?
LORELEI!
YOU CANNOT HELP YOURSELF, MIGHTY THOR. YOU ARE MINE, BODY AND SOUL.
LORELEI.
ON YOUR KNEES BEFORE ME, THOR. SURRENDER YOUR WILL TO ME AND KNEEL IN HOMAGE TO YOUR MISTRESS.
LORELEI.

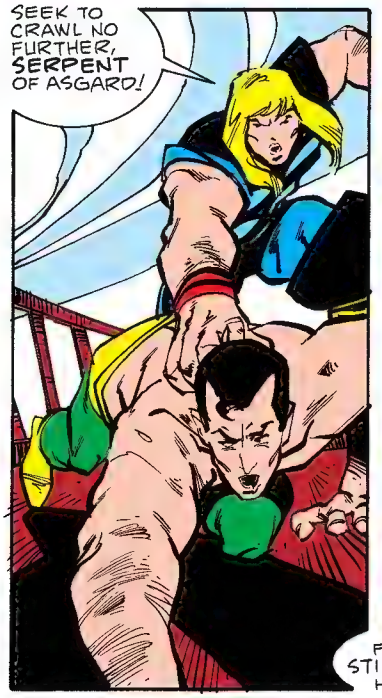

YOU SEE. HE IS MINE!
I AM IMPRESSED. BUT HOW CAME HE HERE, AND AT THIS MOMENT?
WHO CARES?
DO YOU NOT SEE? THIS IS SOME PLOY OF CRAFTY HEIMDALL!
WHAT OF IT?
THANKS TO THE ELIXIR, THOR IS MY SLAVE... AS I AM YOURS!
SO KISS ME AND LET THOR LEARN WHO HIS MASTERS ARE.
LORELEI, IS THIS WISE?
LORELEI?
LORELEI?
Mmmm.

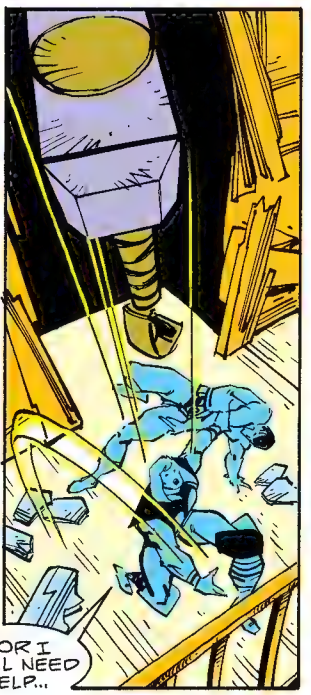

ARRGHH!
THOR!
KEERASSHH!!
LOKI! MY BE-LOVED!
THOR! RELEASE HIM THIS INSTANT!
NO! MY LIMBS TURN TO WATER AT THE SOUND OF LORELEI'S VOICE!
BUT IF I FAIL NOW, ALL OF ASGARD IS DOOMED!
THOR PAUSES FOR A MOMENT! HIS FURIOUS ANGER MUST BE ALL THAT STANDS BETWEEN HIM AND HIS THRALLDOM!
IF I CAN BUT DISTRACT HIM PROPERLY FOR A MOMENT...
...HE SHALL YET BE OUR WILLING SLAVE!


THOR.
DARLING, FORESAKE THIS FIGHT.
I LONG TO HOLD THEE.
COME TO ME.
THOR! LOOK! THY BELOVED CALLS TO YOU IRRESISTIBLY!
WHA--?!
NOT THIS! NOT NOW!

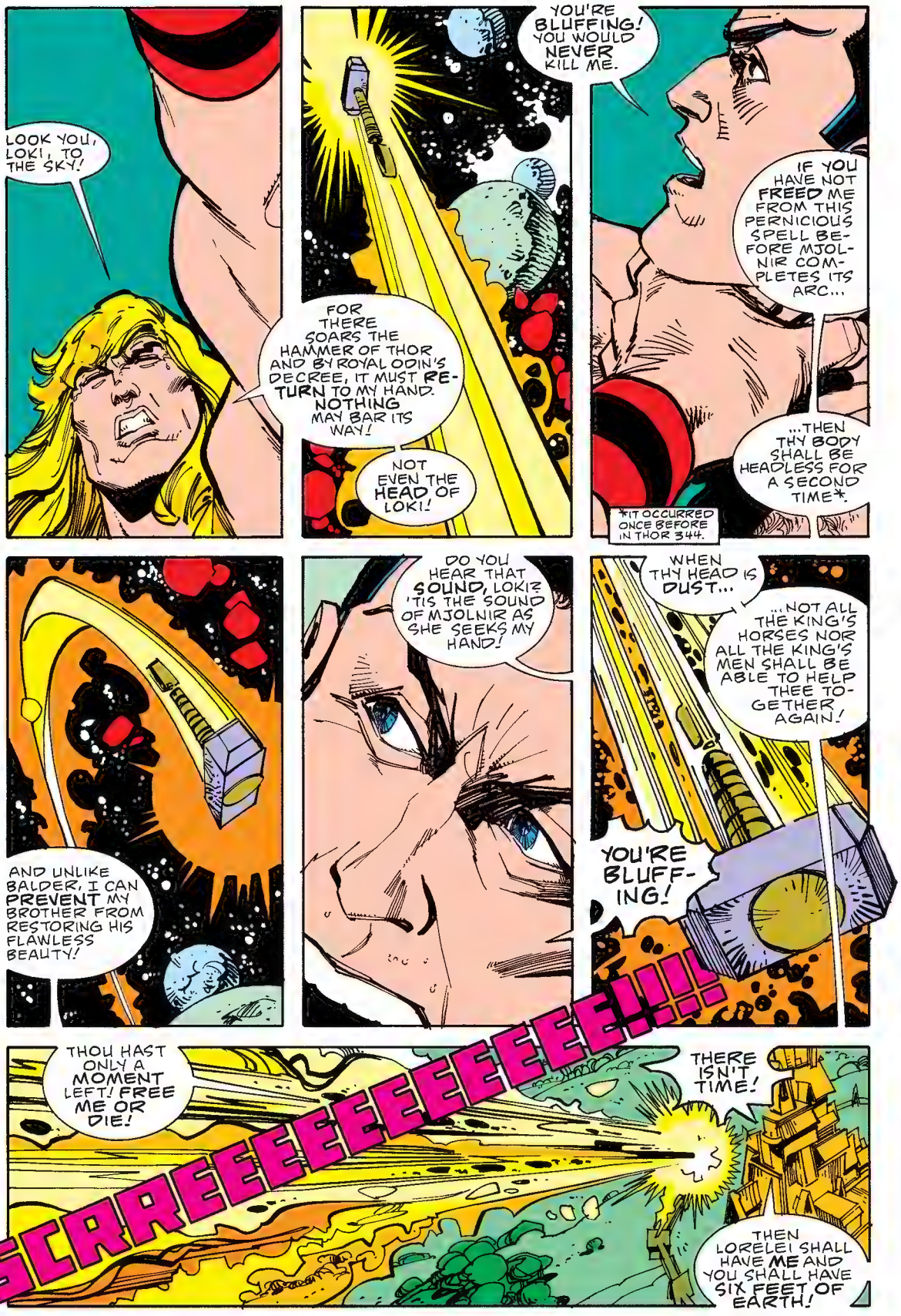
I CANNOT HOLD MY THOUGHTS! LORELEI, MY BELOVED!
THOR.
MY DEAREST.
EMBRACE ME.
LORELEI ...I...I...

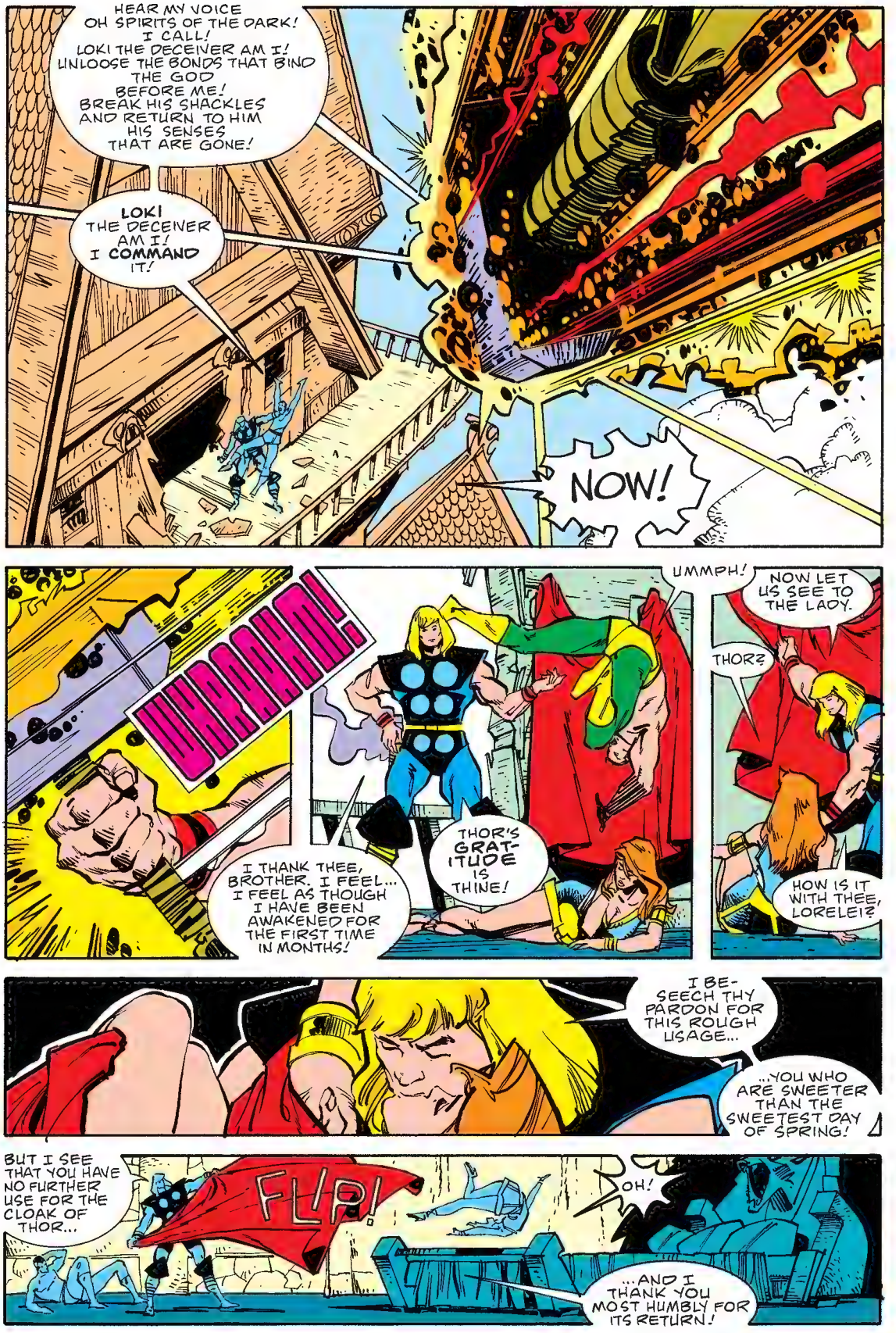

NO!
LET MJOLNIR, THE HAMMER OF THOR, ANSWER...
...AND BLOW THESE INSUBSTANTIAL VISIONS AWAY BEFORE THEY UNMAN ME!
Whakk!
OHH!

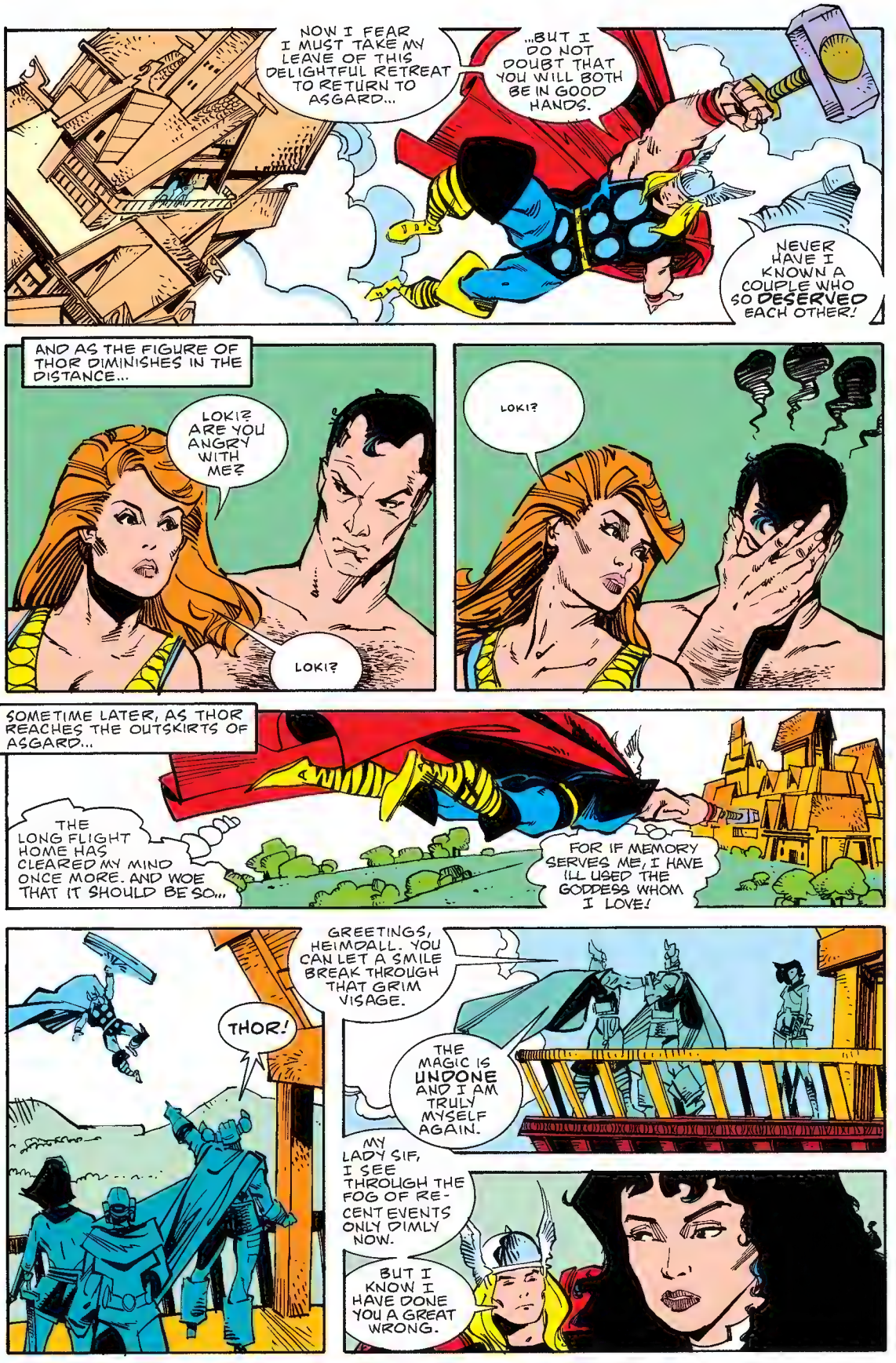

SEEK TO CRAWL NO FURTHER, SERPENT OF ASGARD!


FOR I STILL NEED HELP...

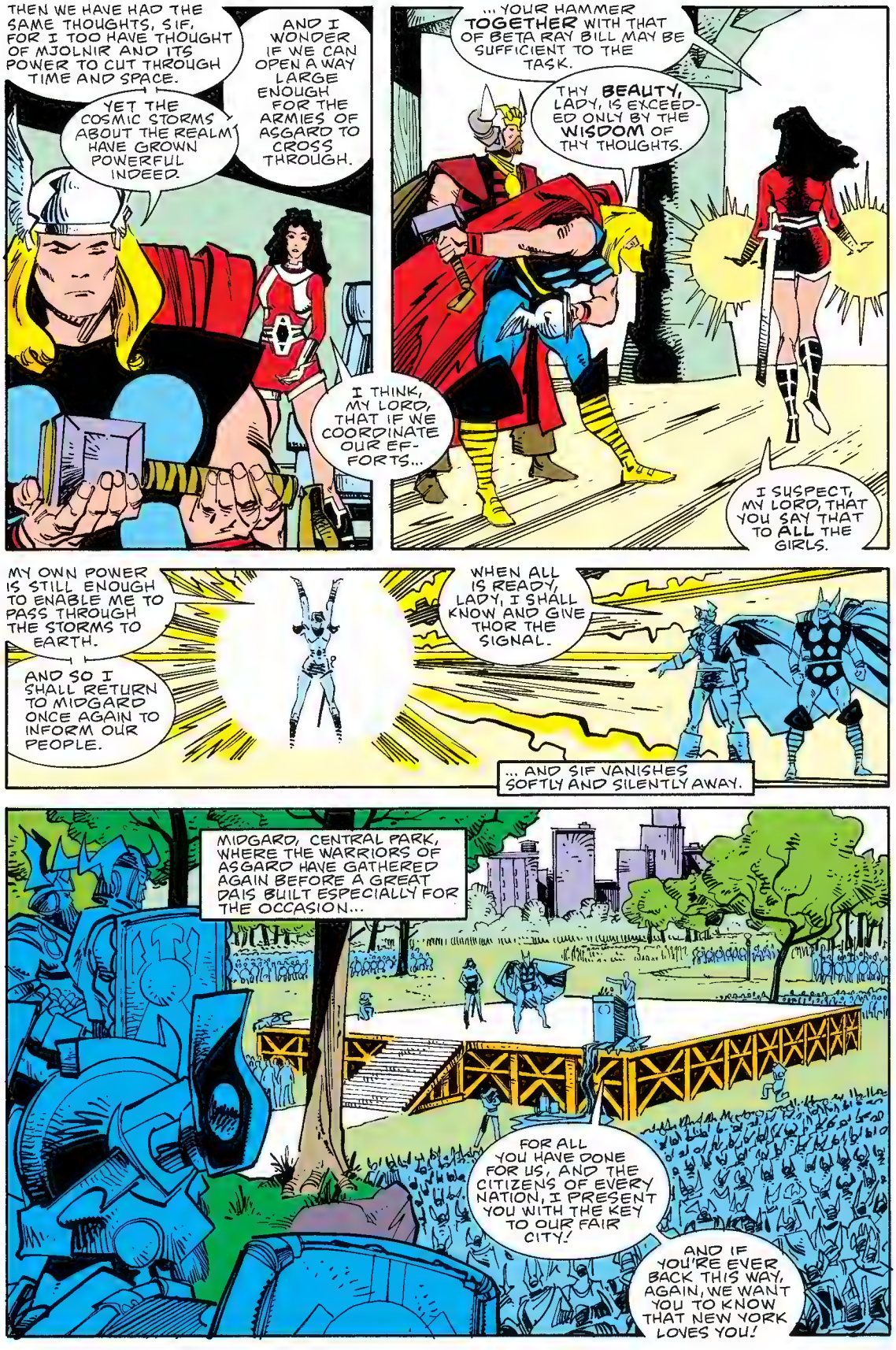
...AND ONLY LOKI, THE CUNNING SORCERER CAN AID ME NOW!


LOOK YOU, LOKI, TO THE SKY!
FOR THERE SOARS THE HAMMER OF THOR AND BY ROYAL ODIN'S DECREE, IT MUST RETURN TO MY HAND. NOTHING MAY BAR ITS WAY!
NOT EVEN THE HEAD OF LOKI!
YOU'RE BLUFFING! YOU WOULD NEVER KILL ME.
IF YOU HAVE NOT FREED ME FROM THIS PERNICIOUS SPELL BEFORE MJOLNIR COMPLETES ITS ARC...
...THEN THY BODY SHALL BE HEADLESS FOR A SECOND TIME*.
*IT OCCURRED ONCE BEFORE IN THOR 344.
AND UNLIKE BALDER, I CAN PREVENT MY BROTHER FROM RESTORING HIS FLAWLESS BEAUTY!
DO YOU HEAR THAT SOUND, LOKI? 'TIS THE SOUND OF MJOLNIR AS SHE SEEKS MY HAND!
WHEN THY HEAD IS DUST...
...NOT ALL THE KING'S HORSES NOR ALL THE KING'S MEN SHALL BE ABLE TO HELP THEE TOGETHER AGAIN!
YOU'RE BLUFFING!
SCRREEEEEEEEEEE!!!!
THOU HAST ONLY A MOMENT LEFT! FREE ME OR DIE!
THERE ISN'T TIME!
THEN LORELEI SHALL HAVE ME AND YOU SHALL HAVE SIX FEET OF EARTH!

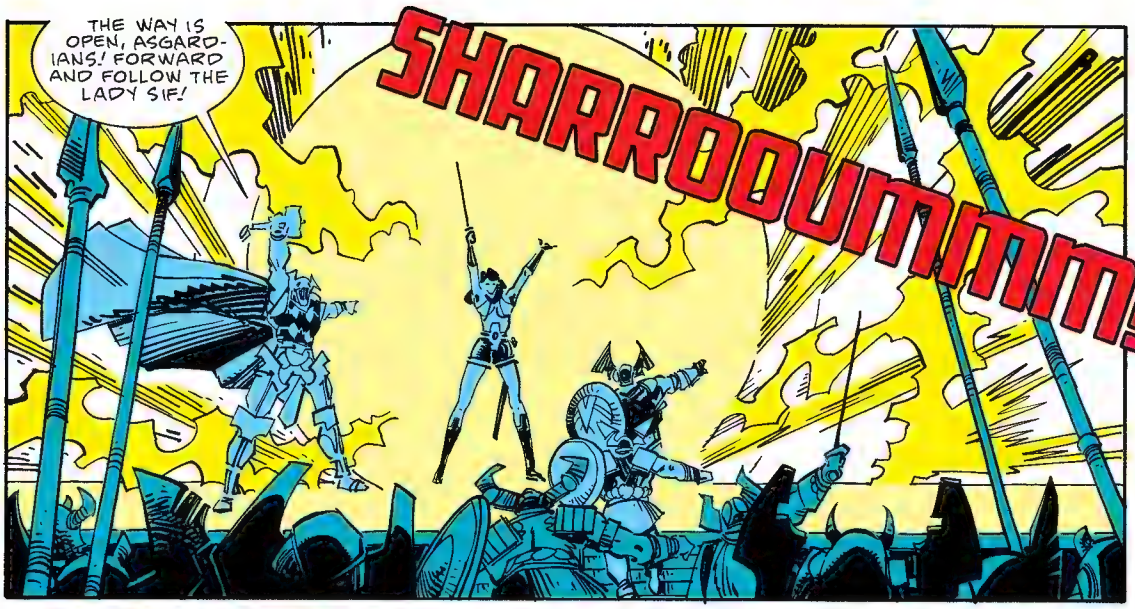

HEAR MY VOICE OH SPIRITS OF THE DARK! I CALL! LOKI THE DECEIVER AM I! UNLOOSE THE BONDS THAT BIND THE GOD BEFORE ME! BREAK HIS SHACKLES AND RETURN TO HIM HIS SENSES THAT ARE GONE!
LOKI THE DECEIVER AM I! I COMMAND IT!
NOW!
UHRAAAM!
UMMPH!
I THANK THEE, BROTHER. I FEEL... I FEEL AS THOUGH I HAVE BEEN AWAKENED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MONTHS!
THOR'S GRATITUDE IS THINE!
NOW LET US SEE TO THE LADY.
THOR?
HOW IS IT WITH THEE, LORELEI?
I BESEECH THY PARDON FOR THIS ROUGH USAGE...
...YOU WHO ARE SWEETER THAN THE SWEETEST DAY OF SPRING!
BUT I SEE THAT YOU HAVE NO FURTHER USE FOR THE CLOAK OF THOR...
FLIP!
OH!
...AND I THANK YOU MOST HUMBLY FOR ITS RETURN!

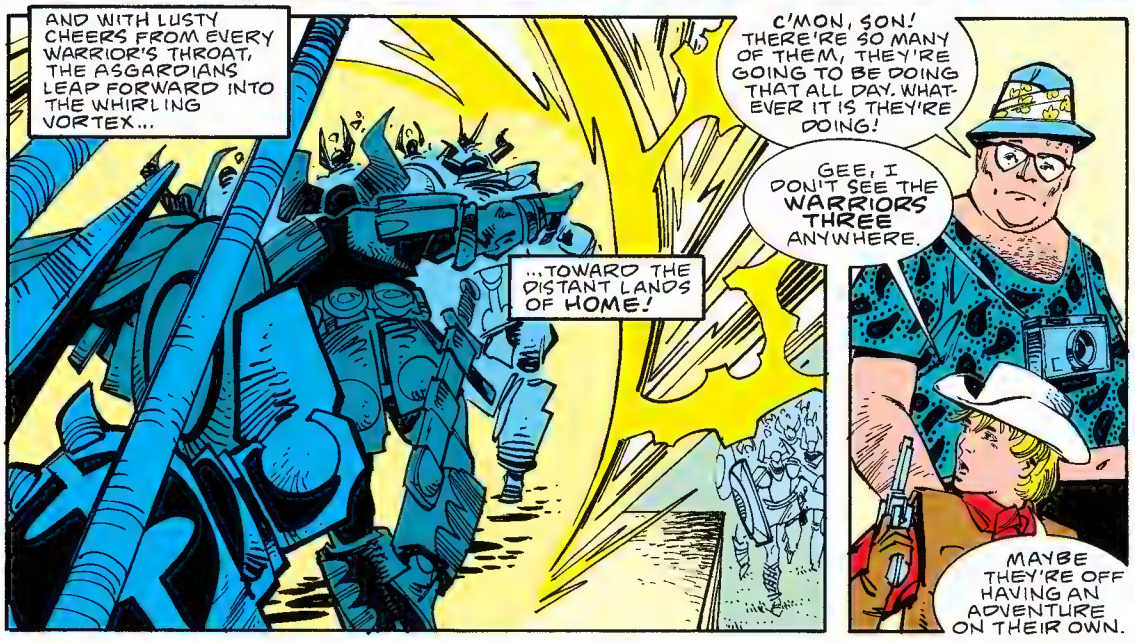

NOW I FEAR I MUST TAKE MY LEAVE OF THIS DELIGHTFUL RETREAT TO RETURN TO ASGARD...
...BUT I DO NOT DOUBT THAT YOU WILL BOTH BE IN GOOD HANDS.
NEVER HAVE I KNOWN A COUPLE WHO SO DESERVED EACH OTHER!
AND AS THE FIGURE OF THOR DIMINISHES IN THE DISTANCE...
LOKI? ARE YOU ANGRY WITH ME?
LOKI?
LOKI?
SOMETIME LATER, AS THOR REACHES THE OUTSKIRTS OF ASGARD...
THE LONG FLIGHT HOME HAS CLEARED MY MIND ONCE MORE. AND WOE THAT IT SHOULD BE SO...
FOR IF MEMORY SERVES ME, I HAVE ILL USED THE GODDESS WHOM I LOVE!
THOR!
GREETINGS, HEIMDALL. YOU CAN LET A SMILE BREAK THROUGH THAT GRIM VISAGE.
THE MAGIC IS UNDONE AND I AM TRULY MYSELF AGAIN.
MY LADY SIF, I SEE THROUGH THE FOG OF RECENT EVENTS ONLY DIMLY NOW.
BUT I KNOW I HAVE DONE YOU A GREAT WRONG.

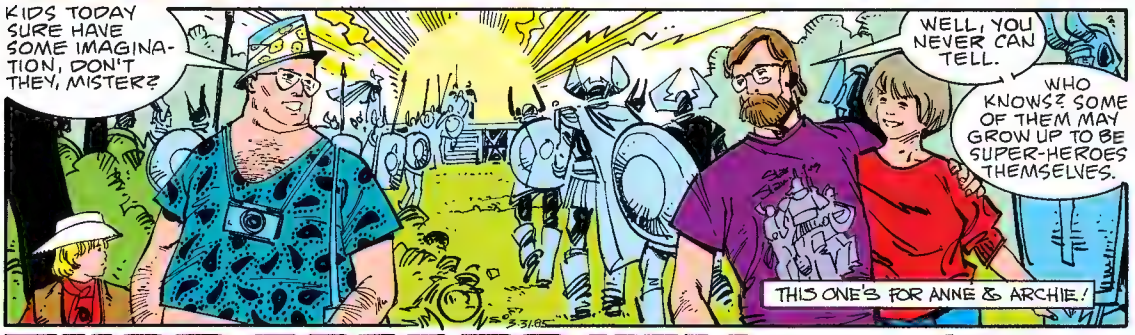
AND I MOST HUMBLY CRAVE THY PARDON FOR WHAT I DID.
I OFFER NO DEFENSE. I CAN SAY ONLY THAT I WAS NOT MYSELF AND SOONER WOULD I HAVE DIED THAN STRUCK YOU.
PLEASE, MILADY. FORGIVE ME.
THOR, I... I KNOW NOT WHAT TO SAY.
WHY NOT SIMPLY FORGIVE HIM AND BE DONE WITH IT?
HEIMDALL?
FORGIVE ME, BUT OTHER MATTERS PRESS UPON US NOW.
I THINK 'TIS TIME OUR WARRIORS RETURNED TO ASGARD, BUT WITHOUT THE RAINBOW BRIDGE, HOW WILL THEY BE ABLE TO?
YOU ARE RIGHT, MY FRIEND. TIME ENOUGH LATER FOR PRIVATE TALK.
AS FOR THE WARRIORS OF THE GOLDEN REALM...
...WE HAD BEST BEGIN AT ONCE.
IN TRUTH, IT IS BECAUSE OF THEM THAT I HAVE RETURNED HOME.
FOR I HAVE THOUGHT OF A WAY WE MIGHT ACCOMPLISH THIS FEAT.
AND GLAD I AM THAT THOR HATH BEEN RESTORED TO ALL HIS SENSES AND POWER.


THEN WE HAVE HAD THE SAME THOUGHTS, SIF, FOR I TOO HAVE THOUGHT OF MJOLNIR AND ITS POWER TO CUT THROUGH TIME AND SPACE.
AND I WONDER IF WE CAN OPEN A WAY LARGE ENOUGH FOR THE ARMIES OF ASGARD TO CROSS THROUGH.
YET THE COSMIC STORMS ABOUT THE REALM HAVE GROWN POWERFUL INDEED.
I THINK, MY LORD, THAT IF WE COORDINATE OUR EFFORTS...
... YOUR HAMMER TOGETHER WITH THAT OF BETA RAY BILL MAY BE SUFFICIENT TO THE TASK.
THY BEAUTY, LADY, IS EXCEEDED ONLY BY THE WISDOM OF THY THOUGHTS.
I SUSPECT, MY LORD, THAT YOU SAY THAT TO ALL THE GIRLS.
MY OWN POWER IS STILL ENOUGH TO ENABLE ME TO PASS THROUGH THE STORMS TO EARTH.
AND SO I SHALL RETURN TO MIDGARD ONCE AGAIN TO INFORM OUR PEOPLE.
WHEN ALL IS READY, LADY, I SHALL KNOW AND GIVE THOR THE SIGNAL.
... AND SIF VANISHES SOFTLY AND SILENTLY AWAY.
MIDGARD, CENTRAL PARK, WHERE THE WARRIORS OF ASGARD HAVE GATHERED AGAIN BEFORE A GREAT DAIS BUILT ESPECIALLY FOR THE OCCASION...
FOR ALL YOU HAVE DONE FOR US, AND THE CITIZENS OF EVERY NATION, I PRESENT YOU WITH THE KEY TO OUR FAIR CITY!
AND IF YOU'RE EVER BACK THIS WAY, AGAIN, WE WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT NEW YORK LOVES YOU!

WHAT THE HECK IS GOING ON HERE?
HEY, BUDDY, YOU'RE BLOCKING MY SHOT.
MOVE IT OR LOSE IT!
IT'S THE AS-GARDIANS, POP! THEY'RE GOING HOME!
UH, SON, MAYBE WE'D BETTER MOVE BACK A BIT.
LOOK! THERE'S HERMOD! AND THERE'S TYR!
AND THAT'S GOTTA BE THE EXECUTIONER!
HE MAY BE AS STRONG AS THOR HIMSELF!
BETTER GIVE THE MAN A LITTLE ROOM, NICO.
AND UP THERE! THAT'S SIF...
...AND THAT HAS TO BE BETA RAY BILL!
WARRIORS, THE TIME HAS COME!
WHOSE TIME HAS COME?
DON'T YOU GET IT, POP?
BILL'S HAMMER IS CREATING A MAGIC DOORWAY! THEY'RE ALL GONNA GO THROUGH IT BACK HOME!
AND IN DISTANT ASGARD...
NOW, THOR!
...AND AS THE WHIRLING HAMMERS MATCH VELOCITIES AND SPIN...




AND WITH LUSTY CHEERS FROM EVERY WARRIOR'S THROAT, THE ASGARDIANS LEAP FORWARD INTO THE WHIRLING VORTEX...
...TOWARD THE DISTANT LANDS OF HOME!
C'MON, SON! THERE'RE SO MANY OF THEM, THEY'RE GOING TO BE DOING THAT ALL DAY. WHATEVER IT IS THEY'RE DOING!
GEE, I DON'T SEE THE WARRIORS THREE ANYWHERE.
MAYBE THEY'RE OFF HAVING AN ADVENTURE ON THEIR OWN.


KIDS TODAY SURE HAVE SOME IMAGINATION, DON'T THEY, MISTER?
WELL, YOU NEVER CAN TELL.
WHO KNOWS? SOME OF THEM MAY GROW UP TO BE SUPER-HEROES THEMSELVES.
THIS ONE'S FOR ANNE & ARCHIE!

NEXT: **THOR GOES TO HEL!**

AND TAKES A **LOT** OF FOLKS WITH HIM!

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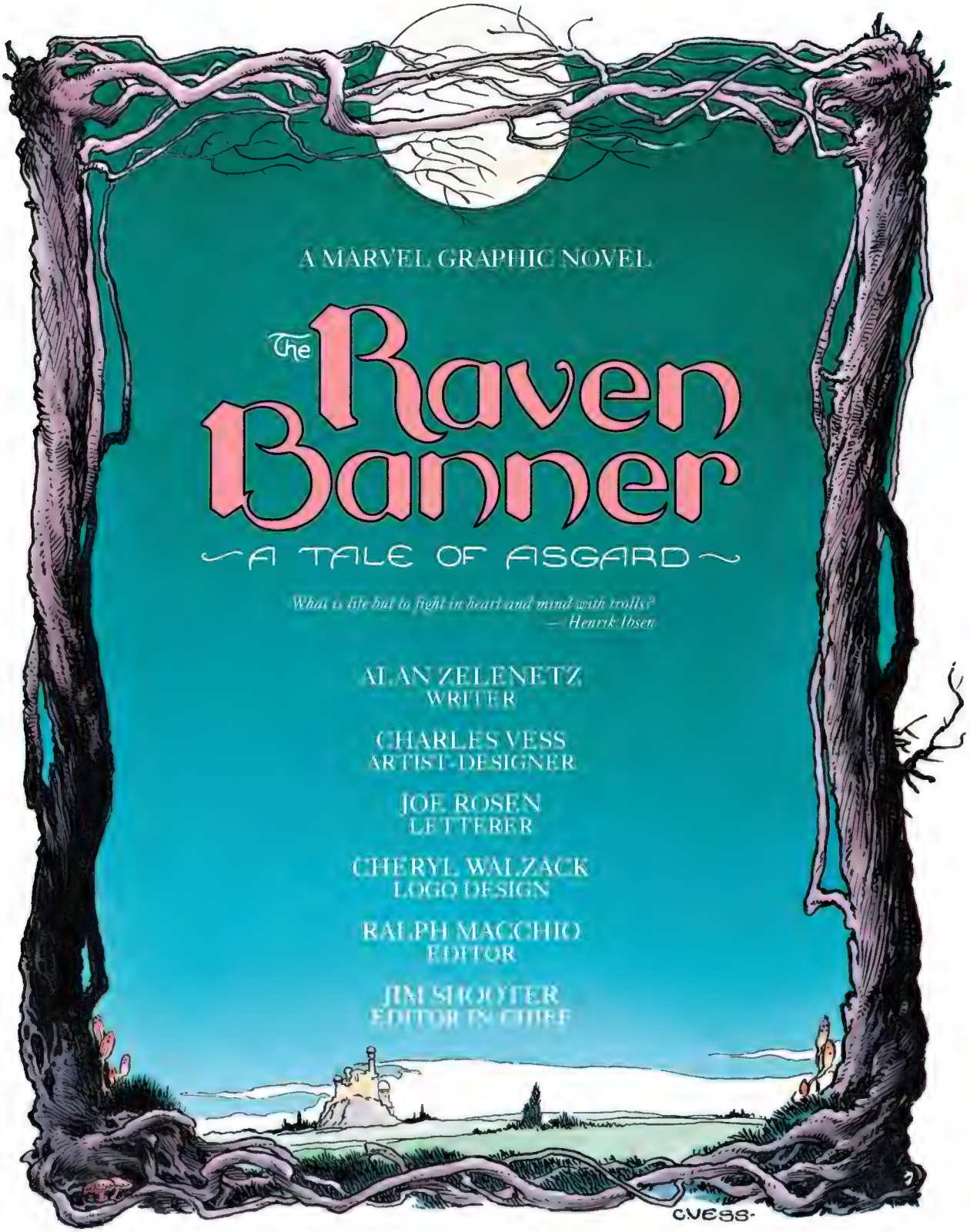
A MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVEL
The Raven Banner
A TALE OF ASGARD
What is life but to fight in heart and mind with trolls?
— Henrik Ibsen
ALAN ZELENETZ
WRITER
CHARLES VESS
ARTIST-DESIGNER
JOE ROSEN
LETTERER
CHERYL WALZACK
LOGO DESIGN
RALPH MACCHIO
EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
CVESS

This one's for Arthur Rackham and Hal Foster, who were with me every step of the way.
— Charles Vess

For my parents — and for Barbara, Mikey, and Karen, who make each day a fantasy.
— A.Z.

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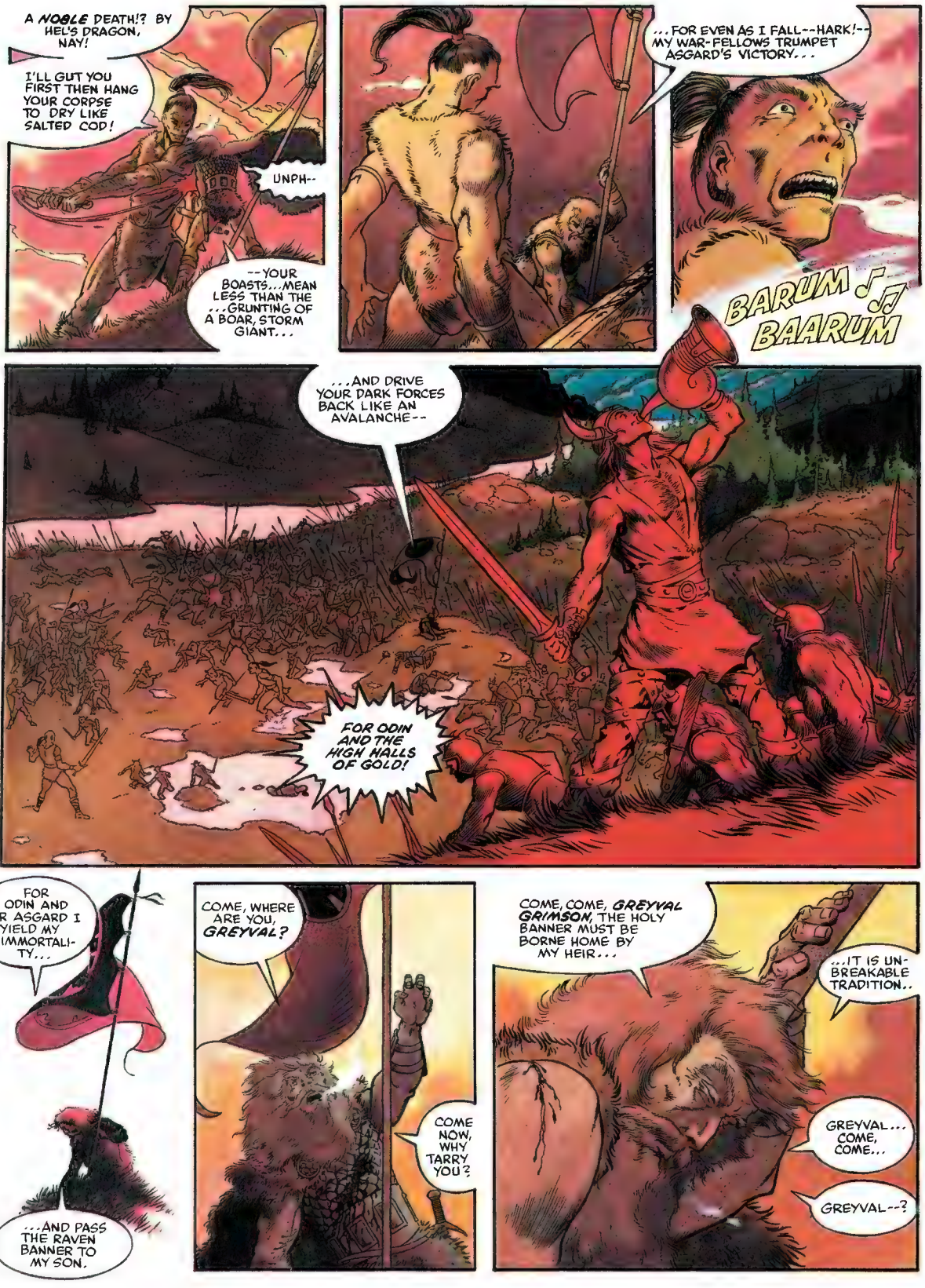
IT BEFELL IN CELESTIAL ASGARD LONG, LONG, AND VERY LONG AGO, WHEN GODS WERE MANY AND ODIN ETERNAL KING...
...THAT THE HATEFUL GIANTS HELD WAR AGAINST THE ALL-FATHER'S HOST, AND HEAVEN'S ROLLING MEADOWS RANG WITH MIGHTY BATTLE...
A SONG OF SHARP-HONED STEEL, FOES OF ASGARD!
BRING DOWN SLAUGHTER ON THE PLAIN OF IDA AND GRIEF TO THE GOLDEN REALM!
GRANT NO GROUND AND NO QUARTER, BOLD SONS OF ODIN!
THE RAVEN BANNER SPREADS TO THE WIND.
ITS MAGIC BRINGS VICTORY TO THOSE WHO FIGHT BENEATH IT...
...THOUGH HE WHOSE HONOR IT IS TO CARRY THE PENNON MUST ALWAYS DIE IN BATTLE. SUCH IS ITS ENCHANT-MENT.
AYE, DIE YOU WILL, STANDARD BEARER, FOR SNORTH--WHOSE MERE GLANCE CAN SPLINTER SHIELDS--CARVES A PATH OF BONE AND BLOOD TO CUT YOU DOWN.
SKRAATH

FORGED ON A TIMELOST ANVIL BEFORE THE HOAR-FROST OGRES FIRST CRAWLED OUT OF ICE AND RIME, MY SWORD HAS DRUNK MORE CRIMSON ALE THAN IRON-JAWED FENRIS, THE WOLF OF WOLVES.
THIS BLADE BRINGS THEE TIDINGS OF DEATH, GODLING.
TO SAVE IMMORTAL ASGARD, A GOD MUST DIE.
THIS NOBLE FATE IS THE GLORY OF GRIM MAGNUS AND THE FAME OF HIS FATHER'S HOUSE.


A NOBLE DEATH!? BY HEL'S DRAGON, NAY!
I'LL GUT YOU FIRST THEN HANG YOUR CORPSE TO DRY LIKE SALTED COD!
UNPH--
--YOUR BOASTS...MEAN LESS THAN THE ...GRUNTING OF A BOAR, STORM GIANT...
...FOR EVEN AS I FALL--HARK!-- MY WAR-FELLOWS TRUMPET ASGARD'S VICTORY...
BARUM BAARUM
...AND DRIVE YOUR DARK FORCES BACK LIKE AN AVALANCHE--
FOR ODIN AND THE HIGH HALLS OF GOLD!
FOR ODIN AND FOR ASGARD I YIELD MY IMMORTALITY...
...AND PASS THE RAVEN BANNER TO MY SON.
COME, WHERE ARE YOU, GREYVAL?
COME NOW, WHY TARRY YOU?
COME, COME, GREYVAL GRIMSON, THE HOLY BANNER MUST BE BORNE HOME BY MY HEIR...
...IT IS UNBREAKABLE TRADITION..
GREYVAL... COME, COME...
GREYVAL--?

GRIM MAGNUS IS DEAD!
AND HERE'S THE MAGIC BANNER!
HEEAII! 'TIS OURS!
WE'VE SERVED THE GIANTS WELL!
ONCE THEY REGAIN THIS HOUR'S LOSSES, OUR SKY-TALL ALLIES WILL LIFT THE GODS' OWN BANNER 'GAINST THE GODS THEMSELVES.
HYEK! ON THAT DAY, SWEET CHAOS WILL RETURN TO HEAVEN'S REALM, AS IN THE WINTRY AGE OF THE GREAT ICE COW, BEFORE EAST WAS EAST AND WEST WAS WEST.
NYAII! BEHOLD!
THE CURSED CHOOSERS OF THE SLAIN RIDE THE CLOUDS!
BAH! THEY COME FOR ODIN'S WAR-DEAD TO FILL VALHALLA'S HERO-HALL.
A DOOM OF SPITE ON THESE VALKYRIES AND THEIR STEEDS-- DAMN, DOUBLE DAMN, AND THRICE CONFOUND THEM!
COME QUICK, BROTHERS, BEFORE WE ARE FOUND OUT.
BACK TO THE TROLL-LIGHT BENEATH DARK GUNDERSHELM.
AND THE LAST BEHIND MUST MURMUR A WORM-CHILD'S RUNE, "SOIL AND SOD AND SOD AND SOIL, CONCEAL OUR CAVERNS AGAINST ALL SEARCHING EYES."

THE SPEARS ARE ALL FLOWN. THE WAR-AXE IS STILLED. TO THE TASK!
SWORD-SISTERS, ALIGHT! AND GATHER THE WAR-FATHER'S KNIGHTS WHERE THEY SLEEP ON THE FIELD BELOW.
ODIN'S THE WILL, OURS THE DUTY.
HERE LIES GRIM MAGNUS, HAIL HIS GLORY!
THE HUE OF LIFE HAS LEFT THEE, WARRIOR, BUT THY BATTLE-FAME LIVES ON.
HENCEFORTH ASGARD'S SHIELD-BROTHERS WILL SWEAR SOLEMN OATHS BY THY NAME. THY DESTINY'S FULFILLED.
THE BANNER'S GONE. 'TIS CERTAIN GREYVAL'S BORNE IT HOME-- BOLD GREYVAL, AYE, MY HEART'S BETROTHED.
OF ALL THE GODS, HE IS MY LOVE'S DESIRE, WHOM TIME AND CUSTOM HONOR WITH THE HOLY BANNER.
FLY, THUNDER-HOOF!
THY MISTRESS SYGNET BIDS THEE HIE ALOFT THE NOBLEST BURDEN. GRIM MAGNUS BORE THE BANNER OF CERTAIN DOOM, YET STRODE TO BATTLE MORE HAPPY THAN A LAD TO HIS FIRST HUNT.

NOW ALL THIS WHILE IN THE KINGDOM OF THE TROLLS BENEATH DARK GUNDERSHELM, A STRANGER DANCED TO A CURIOUS MELODY...

...PLUCKED ON MAGICAL STRINGS TWICE WOVEN ROUND A NEWBORN ELFCHILD'S YAWN AND PIPED ON THE SHINBONES OF A SPITEFUL ELDER DWARF...

COME, *GREYVAL!* HERE'S MORE MEAD, OUR HONORED GUEST.

MORE MEAD?

BUT I'VE ALREADY DRUNK ENOUGH TO DROWN A GIANT--?

COME, GOD OF ASGARD-- WHAT'S ONE SWEET TANKARD MORE OF HONEYED WINE?

OR YET ANOTHER?

BY ODIN'S BEARD, I'LL SAY YOU TROLLS MIX A-- HIC-- HEADY BREW.

CLASP MY WAIST AGAIN, GREYVAL...

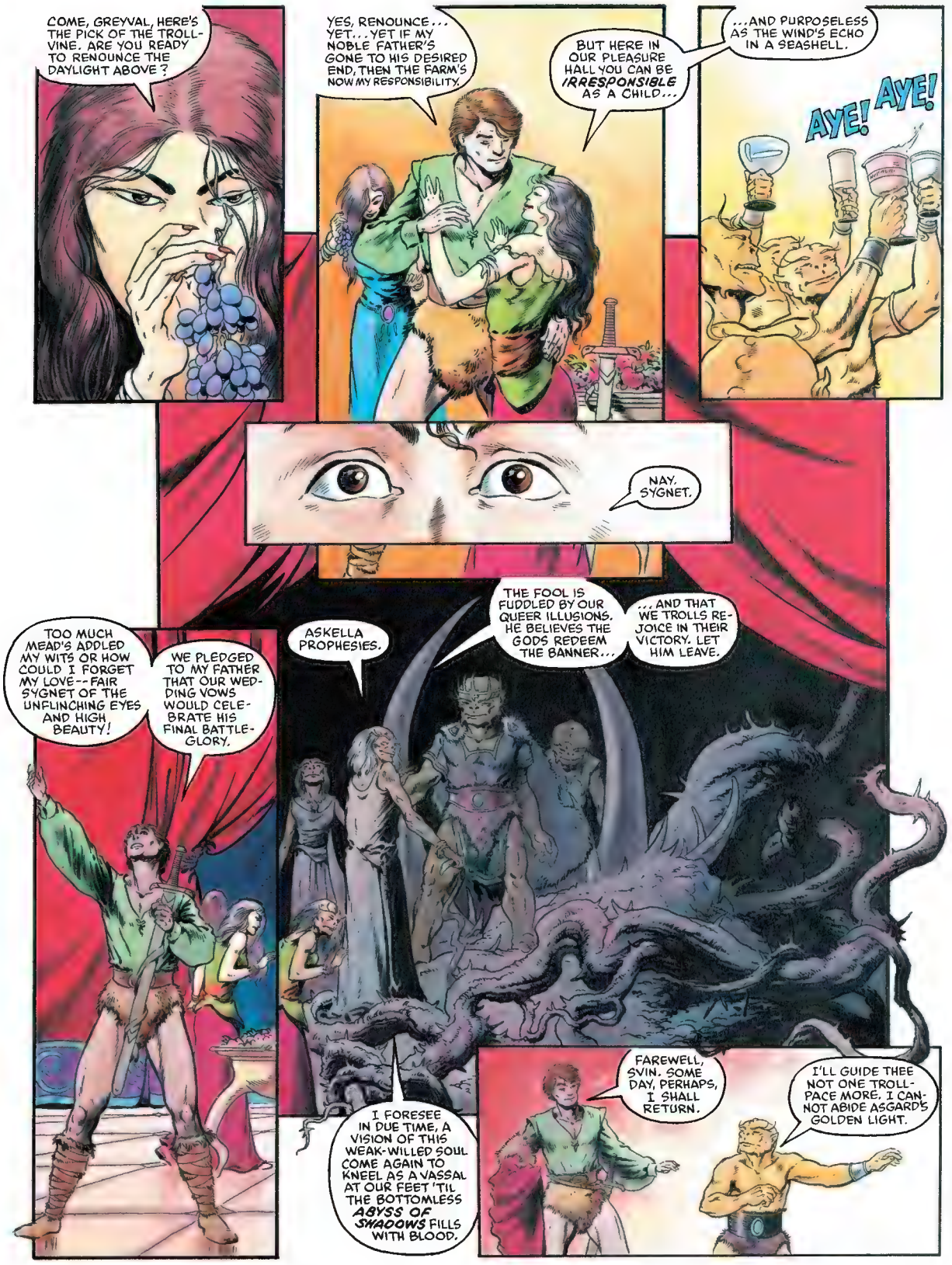
...AND WHIRL ME THE WAY OF LOVERS WHEN THEIR HEARTS BURN LIKE THE FIRES OF MUSPELHEIM.

WORD IS COME FROM THE PLAIN OF IDA.

ASKELLA!

WITCHWOMAN, WHAT TIDINGS?
THE HURLYBURLY'S DONE. THE GODS HAVE WON.
WON! BLESSED FORTUNE! AND THE BANNER--?
GONE.
MY FATHER'S... DEAD THEN.
YOU BADE ME SWEAR NOT TO MOURN YOU, FATHER. I'LL HONOR MY WORD.
A BRAVE WARRIOR'S DEATH-- THAT'S ALL HE DREAMED OF, MY SIRE, FOR ALL THAT I LOVED HIM.
I DARED NOT SPEAK MY TRUE HEART TO HIM, YET NEVER UNDERSTOOD HOW ONE COULD CHOOSE GREY MELANCHOLY DEATH OVER LIFE ETERNAL IN ASGARD'S GREEN FIELDS.
WHICH IS NOT TO SUGGEST GREYVAL GRIMSON'S A COWARD!
HYEK! I, SVIN, WILL FEIGN TO BE THY FOE--
HYEK! A MORTAL THRUST! NOW I PRETEND TO DIE-- OH!
AYE, MY FATHER'S SON IS A BRAVE FELLOW FOR SURE...

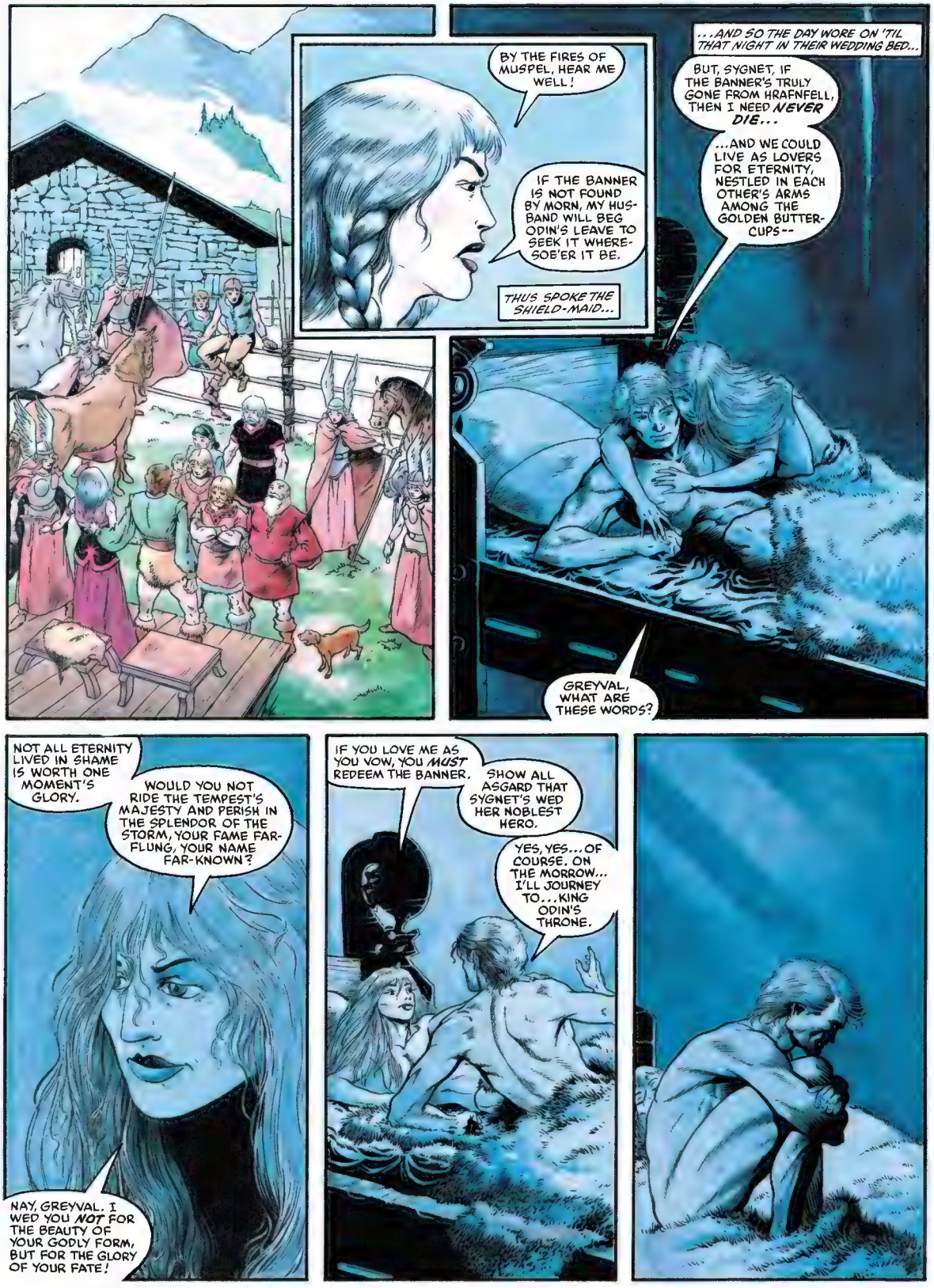
...A BRAVE AND NOBLE FELLOW. WHY I RECALL ONE TIME--
--THERE I AM, HUNTING A GREAT BUCK DEER ACROSS THE SNOW...
...WITH NEITHER SPEAR NOR BOW BUT ONLY THESE BARE HANDS.
SUDDENLY I LEAP UPON HIS ANTLER HORNS AND THROW HIM TO THE GROUND!
SHOW US! I'LL BE YOUR STAG~
BY THE WORLD TREE, SVIN, YOU'RE NOT--?
HURT? HYEK! NO. I WORE ENCHANTMENT 'GAINST THY VIGOR, STALWART KNIGHT.
SO YOU SEE, THOUGH I'M AS FEARLESS AS THE NEXT GOD, STILL I'D RATHER GO ON EATING ASGARD'S GOLDEN APPLES OF IMMORTALITY THAN CARRY THE RAVEN BANNER TO MY ETERNAL DOOM.
I WAS WISE THIS MORN TO JOIN YOUR MERRYMAKING WHILE MY DIVINE FELLOWS WAGED BATTLE ABOVE-GROUND.
FOR IT'S JUST AS YOU TROLLS HAVE SAID. LET ANOTHER GODLY FAMILY REDEEM THE BANNER NOW AND OWN THE HONOR TO DIE FOR ASGARD.

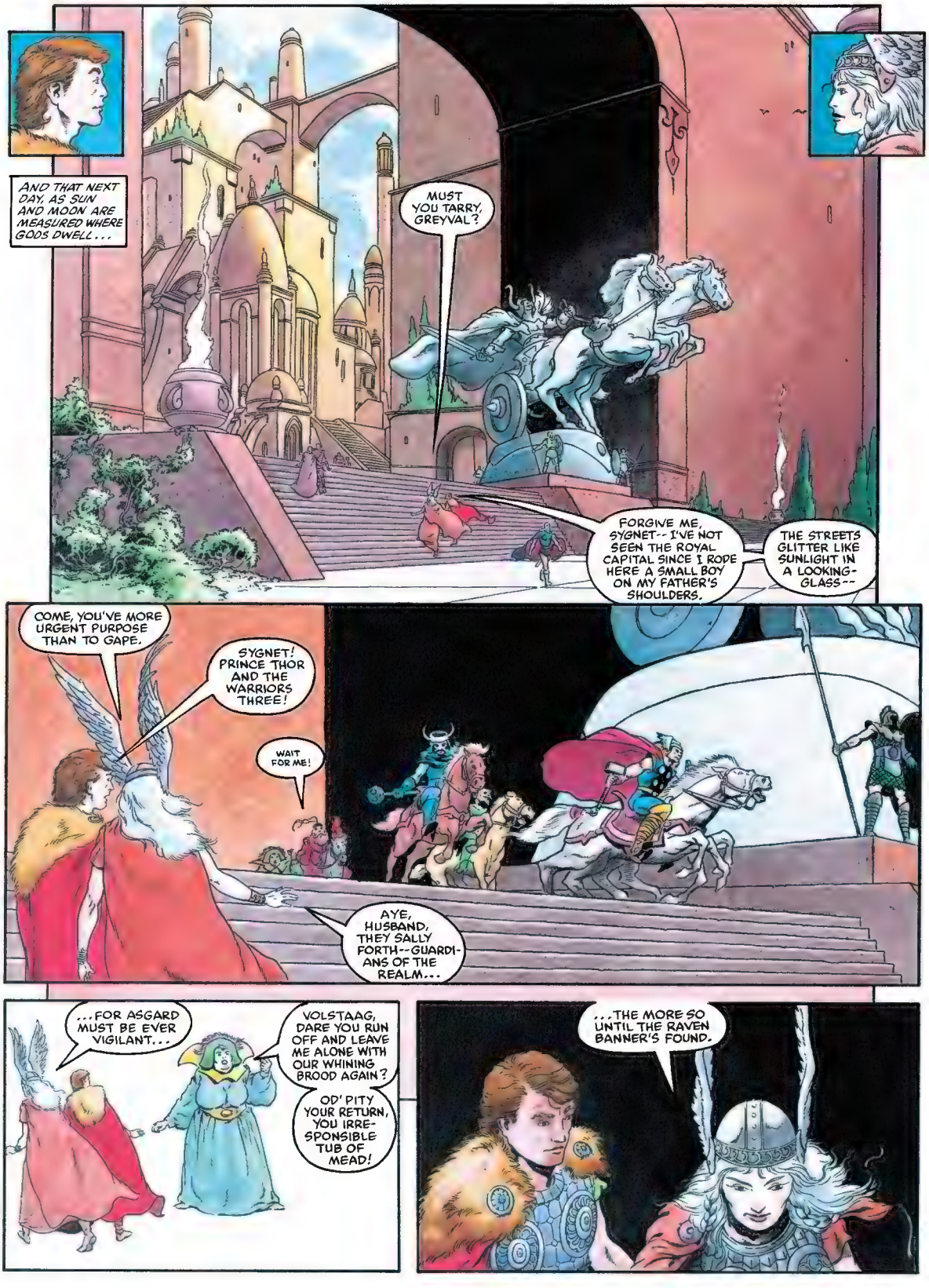

COME, GREYVAL, HERE'S THE PICK OF THE TROLL-VINE. ARE YOU READY TO RENOUNCE THE DAYLIGHT ABOVE?
YES, RENOUNCE... YET... YET IF MY NOBLE FATHER'S GONE TO HIS DESIRED END, THEN THE FARM'S NOW MY RESPONSIBILITY.
BUT HERE IN OUR PLEASURE HALL YOU CAN BE IRRESPONSIBLE AS A CHILD...
...AND PURPOSELESS AS THE WIND'S ECHO IN A SEASHELL.
AYE! AYE!
NAY. SYGNET.
TOO MUCH MEAD'S ADDLED MY WITS OR HOW COULD I FORGET MY LOVE--FAIR SYGNET OF THE UNFLINCHING EYES AND HIGH BEAUTY!
WE PLEDGED TO MY FATHER THAT OUR WEDDING VOWS WOULD CELEBRATE HIS FINAL BATTLE-GLORY.
ASKELLA PROPHESIES.
THE FOOL IS FUDDLED BY OUR QUEER ILLUSIONS. HE BELIEVES THE GODS REDEEM THE BANNER...
...AND THAT WE TROLLS REJOICE IN THEIR VICTORY. LET HIM LEAVE.
I FORESEE IN DUE TIME, A VISION OF THIS WEAK-WILLED SOUL COME AGAIN TO KNEEL AS A VASSAL AT OUR FEET 'TIL THE BOTTOMLESS ABYSS OF SHADOWS FILLS WITH BLOOD.
FAREWELL, SVIN. SOME DAY, PERHAPS, I SHALL RETURN.
I'LL GUIDE THEE NOT ONE TROLL-PACE MORE. I CANNOT ABIDE ASGARD'S GOLDEN LIGHT.

SO OFF WENT GREYVAL FROM THE KINGDOM OF THE TROLLS, BACK TO THE GENTLE MEADOW-LANDS OF ASGARD AND THE HOMESTEAD OF HIS FATHER, HRAFNFELL, THE RAVEN'S ROOST...
...WHERE, TRUTH TO SAY, THE NEXT DAY HE AND SYGNET WED, AS WAS THEIR PLIGHTED TROTH...
YES, IT'S TRUE-- ALL ALONE DURING YESTERDAY'S BATTLE I FELLED FIFTEEN GIANTS LIKE THAT MANY PINE TREES--
OH HO, GREYVAL! LAST NIGHT YOU SAID 'TWAS FIVE YOU SLEW.
AND THIS MORNING TEN.
WELL...WELL, YOU SEE... IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE, WHO CAN KEEP COUNT ANYWAY, EH, FRIENDS?
WHY, SO BERSERK WAS I-- I EVEN LEFT THE RAVEN BANNER ON THE FIELD!
AYE, COUSIN, BUT SURELY SOME OTHER WARRIOR RETRIEVED IT AND WILL RETURN IT TO ITS RIGHTFUL ROOST AT HRAFNFELL?
YES... WHY...YES, HORSKULD. I TRUST SO.
KNOW THIS, FRIENDS AND KINSMEN.
HAD WE NOT SWORN TO CELEBRATE WITH WEDDING JOY THE JOURNEY OF GRIM MAGNUS TO VALHALLA-- LAND WHERE DWELL THE HONORED DEAD...
...MY HUSBAND WOULD THIS MOMENT SEEK THE BANNER IN THE CITY OF ASGARD.
COME, FELLOWS, THERE'S TIME ENOUGH FOR EARNESTNESS WHEN THE MOON'S FULL AND NIGHTMOTHS FLY.
A HORSE FIGHT'S NEXT!
MAY ODIN RIDE THE WIND ON HIS EIGHT-LEGGED STEED TO SHOWER BLESSINGS ON ALL NEWLYWEDS INDEED
BRIDE AND GROOM, THE HIGH SEATS ARE YOURS FOR THE OCCASION.
THE BETTER TO VIEW YOUR HORSE'S VICTORY, MY HUSBAND.

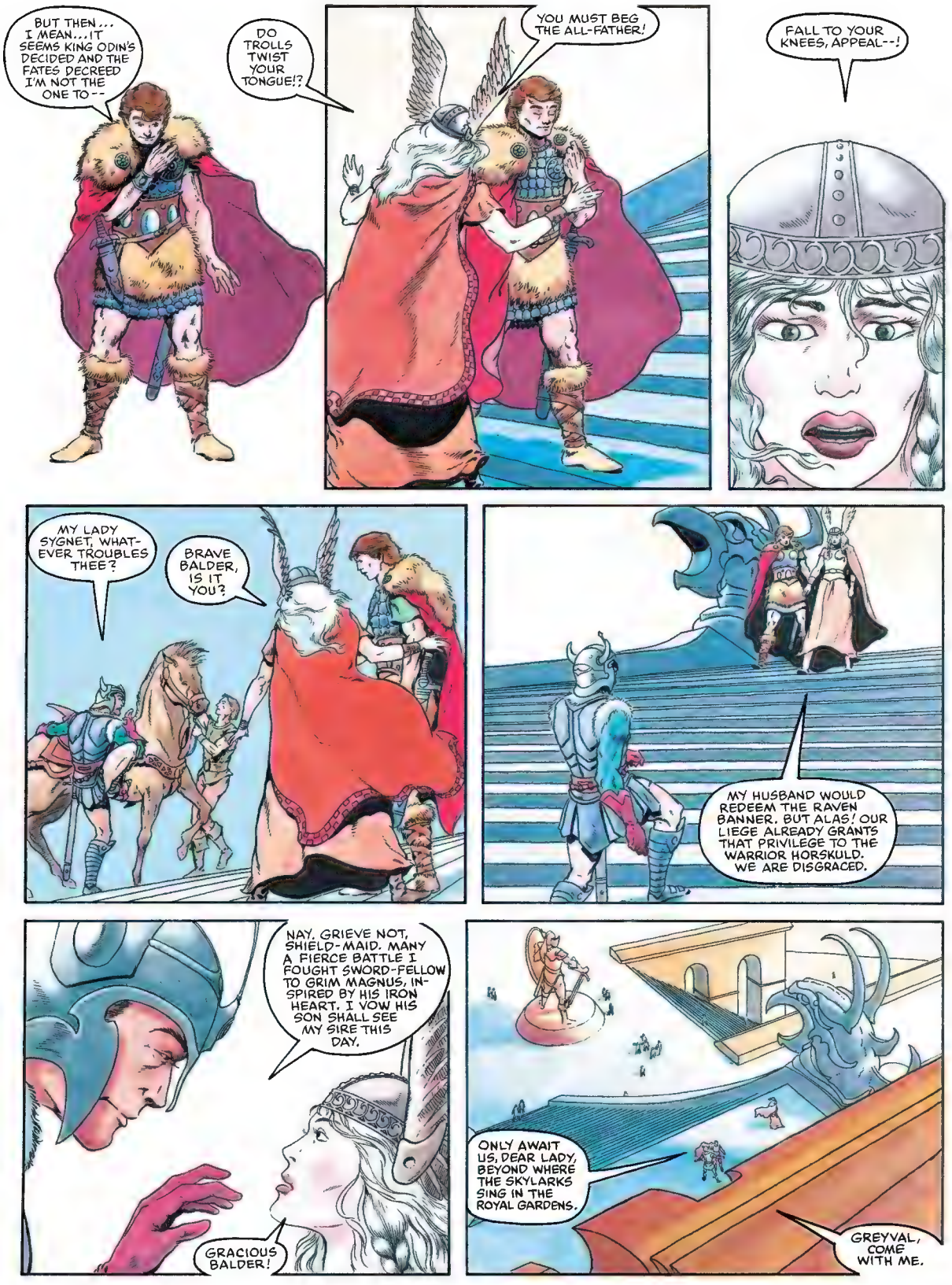
I'VE PIT MY BLACK STALLION AGAINST YOUR SPRIGHTLY STEED, COUSIN,
THE LUCK OF THE RUNES BE WITH YOU...AND YOUR PROUD WIFE.
AND WITH YOU, HORSKULD.
RAISE THE HORSE-GOADS--LET THE MERRIMENT BEGIN!
WHNEEIGH
HNNYH
THEY TAKE TO BATTLE WITH LITTLE PRODDING AS DO TRUE WARRIORS.
AYE, THERE'S YOUTH AND METTLE IN THEM BOTH FOR SURE.
BUT LOOK--A KICK! A BITE!
HERE--
SEE--
HO! GREYVAL'S GIVES WAY--
AND HORSKULD WINS THE MEAD THIS DAY!

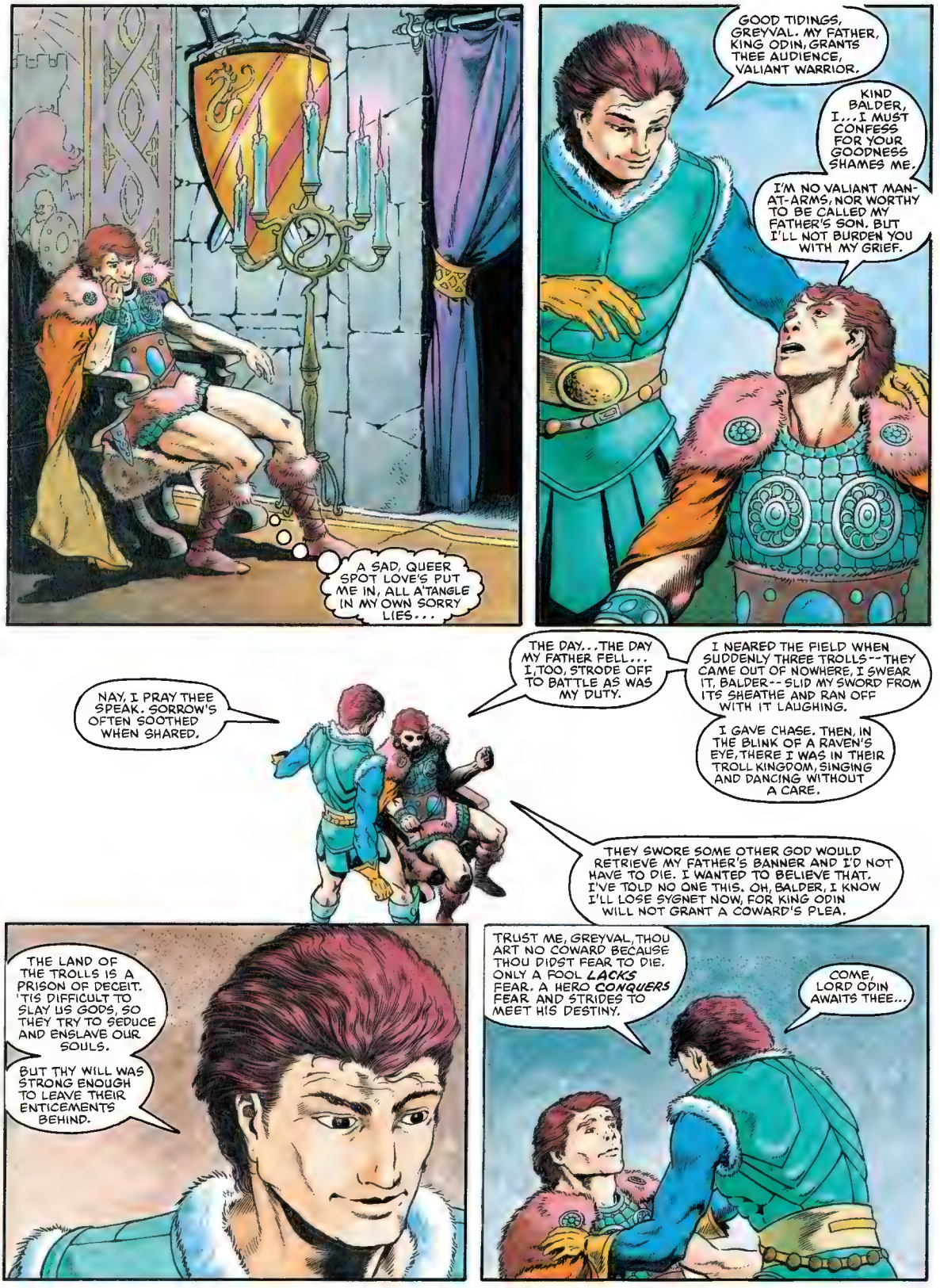
HNNHWHNNH
LORD AND LADY, MY MOST HUMBLE APOLOGIES.
'TWAS NOT MY INTENT TO CLOUD YOUR WEDDING DAY WITH A TRIUMPH OF MY OWN.
NO MATTER, DEAR HORSKULD.
I'D RATHER PLAY GROOM TO MY BRIDE THAN A GROOM TO HORSES ANYWAY. HA!
BUT, GREYVAL--
LOOK!
THE VALKYRIE... ODIN'S OWN CHOOSERS OF THE SLAIN.
COME NO DOUBT TO CELEBRATE THIS HANDFAST MARRIAGE.
GREETINGS, SPEAR-SISTER, AND PARDONS FOR OUR LATENESS TO YOUR FEAST.
BUT THE CITY OF ASGARD'S ALL ASTIR.
THE RAVEN BANNER'S NOT BEEN FOUND.
ALL-FATHER ODIN WAXES FURIOUS, 'TIS FEARED THE TROLLS STOLE THE BANNER FOR THE GIANTS...
...AND GREYVAL GRIMSON'S GUILTY OF GRAVE OVER-SIGHT FOR LEAVING IT BEHIND.
BUT THE TROLLS PROMISED THAT THE GODS WOULD REDEEM--?
SAY, GREYVAL, WAS YOUR MIND REALLY SO LOST IN BATTLE YOU NEGLECTED YOUR MOST SOLEMN DUTY?
PERHAPS HE'S NOT GRIM MAGNUS'S SON AT ALL--BUT A CHANGELING LEFT BY ELVES WHEN HE WAS JUST A SQUAWLING BRAT.


BY THE FIRES OF MUSPEL, HEAR ME WELL!
IF THE BANNER IS NOT FOUND BY MORN, MY HUSBAND WILL BEG ODIN'S LEAVE TO SEEK IT WHERE-SOE'ER IT BE.
THUS SPOKE THE SHIELD-MAID...
...AND SO THE DAY WORE ON 'TIL THAT NIGHT IN THEIR WEDDING BED...
BUT, SYGNET, IF THE BANNER'S TRULY GONE FROM HRAFNFELL, THEN I NEED NEVER DIE...
...AND WE COULD LIVE AS LOVERS FOR ETERNITY, NESTLED IN EACH OTHER'S ARMS AMONG THE GOLDEN BUTTER-CUPS--
GREYVAL, WHAT ARE THESE WORDS?
NOT ALL ETERNITY LIVED IN SHAME IS WORTH ONE MOMENT'S GLORY.
WOULD YOU NOT RIDE THE TEMPEST'S MAJESTY AND PERISH IN THE SPLENDOR OF THE STORM, YOUR FAME FAR-FLUNG, YOUR NAME FAR-KNOWN?
NAY, GREYVAL. I WED YOU NOT FOR THE BEAUTY OF YOUR GODLY FORM, BUT FOR THE GLORY OF YOUR FATE!
IF YOU LOVE ME AS YOU VOW, YOU MUST REDEEM THE BANNER.
SHOW ALL ASGARD THAT SYGNET'S WED HER NOBLEST HERO.
YES, YES... OF COURSE. ON THE MORROW... I'LL JOURNEY TO... KING ODIN'S THRONE.

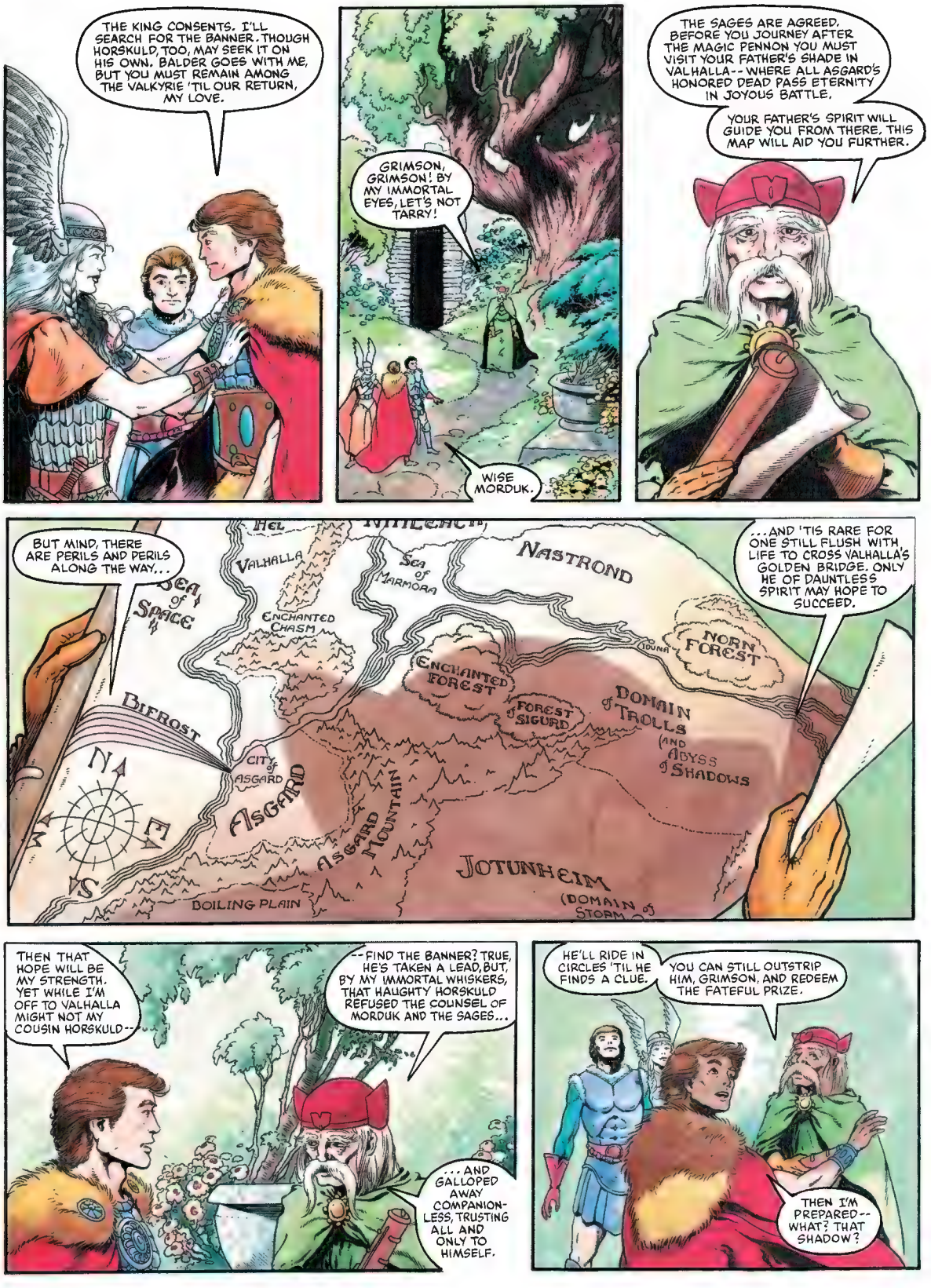

AND THAT NEXT DAY, AS SUN AND MOON ARE MEASURED WHERE GODS DWELL...
MUST YOU TARRY, GREYVAL?
FORGIVE ME, SYGNET-- I'VE NOT SEEN THE ROYAL CAPITAL SINCE I ROPE HERE A SMALL BOY ON MY FATHER'S SHOULDERS.
THE STREETS GLITTER LIKE SUNLIGHT IN A LOOKING-GLASS--
COME, YOU'VE MORE URGENT PURPOSE THAN TO GAPE.
SYGNET! PRINCE THOR AND THE WARRIORS THREE!
WAIT FOR ME!
AYE, HUSBAND, THEY SALLY FORTH--GUARDIANS OF THE REALM...
...FOR ASGARD MUST BE EVER VIGILANT...
VOLSTAAG, DARE YOU RUN OFF AND LEAVE ME ALONE WITH OUR WHINING BROOD AGAIN?
OD' PITY YOUR RETURN, YOU IRRESPONSIBLE TUB OF MEAD!
...THE MORE SO UNTIL THE RAVEN BANNER'S FOUND.

THIS WAY TO THE PALACE, GREYVAL.
WHAT BUSINESS HAS HE HERE?
YES... BUT WHAT IF THE ALL-FATHER DENIES ME AUDIENCE, OR--?
WHY, LOOK! IT'S HORSKULD.
I SHOULD THINK THAT ANSWER'S OBVIOUS, MY LADY.
COWARDS ARE COMMON AS TWIGS. ONLY A RARE GOD CAN REDEEM THE SHAME MY COUSIN'S BROUGHT ON US ALL.
KING ODIN GRANTS ME LEAVE TO SEEK THE LOST BANNER.
BUT TRADITION--?
TRADITION? MY FATHER IS HALF-BROTHER TO GRIM MAGNUS. IT'S NO BREACH OF CUSTOM IF I'M APPOINTED TO SUCCEED WHERE MY BLOOD-COUSIN FAILED.
PERHAPS YOU'VE WED THE WRONG CHAMPION, SYGNET, MY FAIR BEAUTY.
YOUR BOLD HUSBAND SEEMS AS PALE AS CURDLED CREAM, GREAT FIGHTING-MAN THOUGH HE PRETENDS TO BE. HA!
GOOD NOON NOW, BRIDE AND GROOM, MY TASK IS URGENT. THE LUCK OF THE RUNES BE WITH YOU.


BUT THEN... I MEAN...IT SEEMS KING ODIN'S DECIDED AND THE FATES DECREED I'M NOT THE ONE TO--
DO TROLLS TWIST YOUR TONGUE!?
YOU MUST BEG THE ALL-FATHER!
FALL TO YOUR KNEES, APPEAL--!
MY LADY SYGNET, WHATEVER TROUBLES THEE?
BRAVE BALDER, IS IT YOU?
MY HUSBAND WOULD REDEEM THE RAVEN BANNER. BUT ALAS! OUR LIEGE ALREADY GRANTS THAT PRIVILEGE TO THE WARRIOR HORSKULD. WE ARE DISGRACED.
NAY. GRIEVE NOT, SHIELD-MAID. MANY A FIERCE BATTLE I FOUGHT SWORD-FELLOW TO GRIM MAGNUS, INSPIRED BY HIS IRON HEART. I VOW HIS SON SHALL SEE MY SIRE THIS DAY.
GRACIOUS BALDER!
ONLY AWAIT US, DEAR LADY, BEYOND WHERE THE SKYLARKS SING IN THE ROYAL GARDENS.
GREYVAL, COME WITH ME.


A SAD, QUEER SPOT LOVE'S PUT ME IN, ALL A'TANGLE IN MY OWN SORRY LIES...
GOOD TIDINGS, GREYVAL. MY FATHER, KING ODIN, GRANTS THEE AUDIENCE, VALIANT WARRIOR.
KIND BALDER, I...I MUST CONFESS FOR YOUR GOODNESS SHAMES ME.
I'M NO VALIANT MAN-AT-ARMS, NOR WORTHY TO BE CALLED MY FATHER'S SON. BUT I'LL NOT BURDEN YOU WITH MY GRIEF.
NAY, I PRAY THEE SPEAK. SORROW'S OFTEN SOOTHED WHEN SHARED.
THE DAY...THE DAY MY FATHER FELL... I, TOO, STRODE OFF TO BATTLE AS WAS MY DUTY.
I NEARED THE FIELD WHEN SUDDENLY THREE TROLLS--THEY CAME OUT OF NOWHERE, I SWEAR IT, BALDER--SLID MY SWORD FROM ITS SHEATHE AND RAN OFF WITH IT LAUGHING.
I GAVE CHASE. THEN, IN THE BLINK OF A RAVEN'S EYE, THERE I WAS IN THEIR TROLL KINGDOM, SINGING AND DANCING WITHOUT A CARE.
THEY SWORE SOME OTHER GOD WOULD RETRIEVE MY FATHER'S BANNER AND I'D NOT HAVE TO DIE. I WANTED TO BELIEVE THAT. I'VE TOLD NO ONE THIS. OH, BALDER, I KNOW I'LL LOSE SYGNET NOW, FOR KING ODIN WILL NOT GRANT A COWARD'S PLEA.
THE LAND OF THE TROLLS IS A PRISON OF DECEIT. 'TIS DIFFICULT TO SLAY US GODS, SO THEY TRY TO SEDUCE AND ENSLAVE OUR SOULS.
BUT THY WILL WAS STRONG ENOUGH TO LEAVE THEIR ENTICEMENTS BEHIND.
TRUST ME, GREYVAL, THOU ART NO COWARD BECAUSE THOU DIDST FEAR TO DIE. ONLY A FOOL *LACKS* FEAR. A HERO *CONQUERS* FEAR AND STRIDES TO MEET HIS DESTINY.
COME, LORD ODIN AWAITS THEE...

"...UPON HIS GOLDEN THRONE..."
KING ODIN'S FACE IS GRIM, BALDER. I DARE NOT BEG FAVOR BENEATH HIS GAZE--
FORWARD. INTO OUR PRESENCE.
WHY HAST THOU COME, GREYVAL GRIMSON?
GREETINGS, MOST... MOST HIGH ONE... GREETINGS, CREATOR AND KING 'TIL THE CRACK OF DOOM, MAY IT NEVER HASTEN.
I...I IMPLORE YOUR LEAVE TO SEEK THE RAVEN BANNER...
...FOR THE LOSS OF WHICH I ALONE AM... GRIEVOUSLY TO BLAME.
THOU HAST TARRIED, GODLING. THAT PRIVILEGE WE HAVE GRANTED ANOTHER.
FOR EACH MOMENT THE BANNER LIES WITHOUT THESE WALLS, THE DANGER TO OUR REALM GROWS MORE GRAVE.
BY THY LEAVE, FATHER, CANNOT A GOD ATONE?
I PRAY THEE, ALLOW GRIM MAGNUS' SON TO REDEEM HIMSELF, FOR HE IS SORELY PENITENT.
INDEED, BY THY CONSENT I WOULD MYSELF ESCORT HIM ON HIS PRESSING QUEST.


THE KING CONSENTS. I'LL SEARCH FOR THE BANNER. THOUGH HORSKULD, TOO, MAY SEEK IT ON HIS OWN. BALDER GOES WITH ME, BUT YOU MUST REMAIN AMONG THE VALKYRIE 'TIL OUR RETURN, MY LOVE.
GRIMSON, GRIMSON! BY MY IMMORTAL EYES, LET'S NOT TARRY!
WISE MORDUK.
THE SAGES ARE AGREED. BEFORE YOU JOURNEY AFTER THE MAGIC PENNON YOU MUST VISIT YOUR FATHER'S SHADE IN VALHALLA -- WHERE ALL ASGARD'S HONORED DEAD PASS ETERNITY IN JOYOUS BATTLE.
YOUR FATHER'S SPIRIT WILL GUIDE YOU FROM THERE. THIS MAP WILL AID YOU FURTHER.
BUT MIND, THERE ARE PERILS AND PERILS ALONG THE WAY...
...AND 'TIS RARE FOR ONE STILL FLUSH WITH LIFE TO CROSS VALHALLA'S GOLDEN BRIDGE. ONLY HE OF DAUNTLESS SPIRIT MAY HOPE TO SUCCEED.
HEL
NIFLHEIM
VALHALLA
SEA of MARMORA
NASTROND
SEA of SPACE
ENCHANTED CHASM
NORN FOREST
YGGDRASIL
ENCHANTED FOREST
FOREST of SIGURD
DOMAIN of TROLLS
(AND ABYSS of SHADOWS)
BIFROST
CITY of ASGARD
ASGARD
ASGARD MOUNTAIN
JOTUNHEIM
(DOMAIN of STORM
BOILING PLAIN
N
W
E
S
THEN THAT HOPE WILL BE MY STRENGTH. YET WHILE I'M OFF TO VALHALLA MIGHT NOT MY COUSIN HORSKULD--
--FIND THE BANNER? TRUE, HE'S TAKEN A LEAD, BUT, BY MY IMMORTAL WHISKERS, THAT HAUGHTY HORSKULD REFUSED THE COUNSEL OF MORDUK AND THE SAGES...
...AND GALLOPED AWAY COMPANION-LESS, TRUSTING ALL AND ONLY TO HIMSELF.
HE'LL RIDE IN CIRCLES 'TIL HE FINDS A CLUE.
YOU CAN STILL OUTSTRIP HIM, GRIMSON, AND REDEEM THE FATEFUL PRIZE.
THEN I'M PREPARED-- WHAT? THAT SHADOW?

'TIS AGNAR, KING OF EAGLES, COME TO SPEED YOU ON YOUR WAY.
I'LL BID HIM IN BIRD'S TONGUE TO CARRY US VALHALLA-WARDS, GREYVAL.
AGNAR SAYS WE MAY ALIGHT NOW, FRIEND.
FAREWELL, DEAR SYGNET. THE DARK WOLF OF NIGHT WILL DEVOUR ASGARD'S SUN BEFORE I FORGET YOU, BELOVED.
FAREWELL, MY NOBLE HERO.
REMEMBER ALWAYS THAT NOT ALL THE WORLD'S BRAVE SENTIMENTS CAN OUTWEIGH ONE BRAVE DEED.

SO OFF FLEW AGNAR...

...LIKE A WINGED HOPE...

...AND FROM THE TALLEST PEAK IN ALL THE UNIVERSE, *HLIDSKJALF*, THE HIGH MOUNTAIN SEAT, ODIN WATCHED THE KING OF EAGLES GLIDE BEYOND THE CLOUDS...

AH, HERE YOU ARE, MY LORD.

WHY DO YOU HIDE ON HIGH WHERE WINTER IS ETERNAL AND THE AIR MOST CHILL?

TO CLEAR MY HEAD OF BUSY THOUGHTS THAT BUZZ LIKE MAYFLIES, MY BELOVED QUEEN.

SIRE, WHAT THOUGHTS?

WIFE, DID ASGARD NOT ONCE SEEM PEACEFUL BENEATH OUR GAZE?

YET 'TWAS THAT SORT OF PEACE AS REIGNS UPON THE PLACID SEA BEFORE A SPITEFUL WIND-SPRITE STIRS THE TEMPEST TO FURY.

EVEN AS WE SHARE THESE WORDS, THE GIANTS AND THE TROLLS UNITE, THEIR ONE CRUEL PURPOSE TO UNLOOSE BITTER CHAOS ON THE GODS.

OUR FOES ARE VENGEFUL, FRIGGA, SELFISH AND REMORSELESS...

...AND THEY OWN THE RAVEN BANNER OF VICTORY.

TIME'S FATHER WOVE THE ENCHANTED PENNON. THERE IS NONE OTHER LIKE IT.

THEN, ODIN, YOU MUST DISPATCH EVERY WARRIOR TO SCOUR THE DARKEST CORNERS OF OUR REALM--

"NAY, THE ***FATES*** DECREE ONLY A GOD DESCENDED FROM GRIM MAGNUS' LINE MIGHT SAVE THE BANNER. OF THESE, THERE ARE BUT TWO.

"***HORSKULD***, A KNIGHT OF METTLE, BUT FULL OF PRIDE. AND PRIDE IS OFTEN PRELUDE TO A FALL.

"***GREYVAL GRIMSON*** IS THE OTHER, A CALLOW YOUTH OF GOOD INTENT, NOT COWARDLY, BUT RIDDLED WITH SELF-DOUBT.

"BRAVE ***BALDER*** GUIDES HIM ON HIS WAY TO INSTILL CONFIDENCE IN THE GODLING'S SOUL."

IF NOT HE NOR HORSKULD FINDS THE BANNER, I FEAR, DEAR WIFE, THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS, THE DOOM THAT IS RAGNAROK, DRAWS NIGH.

HOWEVER GRAVE THE DANGER, HUSBAND, WE MUST MAKE THE BEST OF IT AND TURN A BOLD FACE TO THE WAITING FOE.

OF AGNAR'S FLIGHT NEED NAUGHT BE SAID SAVE THAT HE SOARED ALOFT AND SAILED PAST THE RAGING RIVER GOPUL...
...SKIMMING ACROSS HILLS HIGHER THAN HEAVEN...
...AND ALL THAT WHILE THE SUN SHONE EVER-PLEASANTLY ON GREYVAL...
...AND THE CLOUDS NEVER DRIZZLED A DROP ON BALDER...
...'TIL AT LENGTH AND AT LAST THEY CAME TO REST ON AN AERIE OVERLOOKING THE ENCHANTED CHASM THAT SEPARATES ASGARD FROM THE LANDS OF THE DEAD...
WHAT IS IT?
THIS IS AS FAR AS AGNAR FLIES. NOT EVEN THE KING OF BIRDS DARES CROSS THE GORGE OF PERILOUS MISTS.
WE MUST DESCEND ALONE ON FOOT.
DOWN THERE? ON FOOT? IT'S IMPOSSIBLE.
NAY, GREYVAL, PUT A STOUT HEART TO A STEEP SLOPE.

MUCH THANKS, AND FAREWELL, YOUR HIGHNESS.
HE SAYS THIS ROPE OF MOUNTAIN SHRUBS WILL CARRY OUR WEIGHT.
COME, I'LL LEAD THE WAY.
WAIT FOR ME.
SLOWLY, SLOWLY--OUCH! THESE THORNS--
THAT STINGS--OH!
CAN'T HOLD ON, OH! ALL'S LOST!
BAAALDERRR!
CLAP
STEADY, FRIEND, STEADY TO THE BOTTOM.
THERE, 'TIS DONE, AND TRUE VALOR DELIGHTS IN THE TESTING.
WHAT NOW, BALDER?

WHY, THROUGH THESE MISTS TO FIND VALHALLA'S GOLDEN BRIDGE,
ONLY UNSHEATHE YOUR SWORD, FOR THESE CLOUDY CAVERNS ARE HOME TO WICKED OGRES AND WINGED WORMS THAT WEAR THE FACES OF FAIR LADIES.
AN ECHO, DO YOU HEAR?
AYE, MOST SORROWFUL.
OH I AM LOST
AND NONE CAN HELP
FOR SOON THE MONSTER EATS ME BONE AND BLOOD
SOMEONE WEEPS AT THE FAR END OF THIS PASS.
PASS? AHA! WHO WOULD PASS OVER THIS OGRE'S SPAN?
WE SEEK SAFE CROSSING TO VALHALLA AND MEAN THEE NO HARM, STRANGER--
GRAAH! NOT FORWARD NOT BACK BUT STAY WHERE YOU'RE AT, FOR YOUR BRAINS AND BONES WILL FILL MY BELLY.

WHAT A FEAST, WHAT A TREAT!
I'LL GNAW ON YOUR RIBS AND PICK YOUR STRINGY FLESH FROM MY TEETH AT LEISURE WITH A DRAGON-TAIL SPIKE.
NAY, WE GODS MAKE NO OGRE'S BANQUET!
HAARGH! LITTLE BRAGGART! I'LL PICKLE YOUR LIMBS--
--AND GARNISH YOUR JELLIED HEAD WITH MUCK SCALLIONS!
OH!
GREYVAL... I'M FALLING...
NEVER!
YAOWW, GRAOOOWL! MY ANKLE!
QUICK, HERE'S A HAND!
A BRAVE DEED, FRIEND.
MORE DESPERATE THAN BRAVE. WHAT SHOULD I DO IF YOU WERE GONE?

OH I AM LOST AND NONE CAN HELP ME AND SOON THE MONSTER--
FOOTSTEPS! OH DEAR, DEARY! HE'S BACK TO EAT ME! I'VE NEVER BEEN EATEN BEFORE. WHATEVER SHALL I--
HERE'S OUR WEEPING VOICE!
MERCY ON US! BUT--? YOU'RE NO OGRE!
OH, THEN, NOBLE SIRS WHO ARE NO OGRE, BE SO KIND TO CUT ME LOOSE, AND QUICK ABOUT IT IF YOU PLEASE IF I MAY...
...FOR I'VE WONDERED AND WISHED ALL THE DAY LONG THAT SOMEONE MIGHT HAPPEN BY--
--AS YOU HAPPEN TO HAVE HAPPENED TO SAVE ME FROM THE STEWPOT.
FEAR NOT-- THERE! YOU'RE FREE.
PINECONES! THAT MAKES ME GIDDY WITH GLEE!
BUT THEN YOU'VE NO IDEA WHO ME IS, THAT IS WHO I AM I MEAN, DO YOU?
I AM ODDBRAND OTTER.
AND IF I'D NOT BUMPED MY HEAD SLIDING DOWN A MUDBANK INTO THE GOPUL RIVER, AS WE OTTER GODS LIKE TO DO FOR PLEASURE-- SLIDE DOWN MUD-BANKS NOT BUMP OUR HEADS...
...THEN I'D NEVER HAVE BEEN CARRIED AWAY TO END UP LOST IN THE ENCHANTED CHASM WHERE THAT HORRIBLE OGRE FOUND ME AND BOUND ME.
HE SWORE HE'D EAT MY EYE-BALLS WITH MUCK RADISH--
--AFTER HE'D FIRST SKINNED ME ALIVE TO MAKE A FUR PILLOW FOR HIS HEAD!
I AM BALDER ODINSON AND MY COM-PANION, GREYVAL GRIMSON.
JOIN US ON OUR WAY TO VALHALLA, FRIEND, FOR THERE IS SAFETY IN COMPANY.
VAL... VALHALLA? LAND OF THE D...D...DEAD? MERCY! THAT'S BORROWING TROUBLE I DARESAY.
LESS TROUBLE THAN GREASING AN OGRE'S GULLET, FELLOW.
HERE'S THY SWORD. LET'S OFF.
OH DEAR, DEARY ARE YOU SURE THIS IS A PRACTICAL THING TO DO?

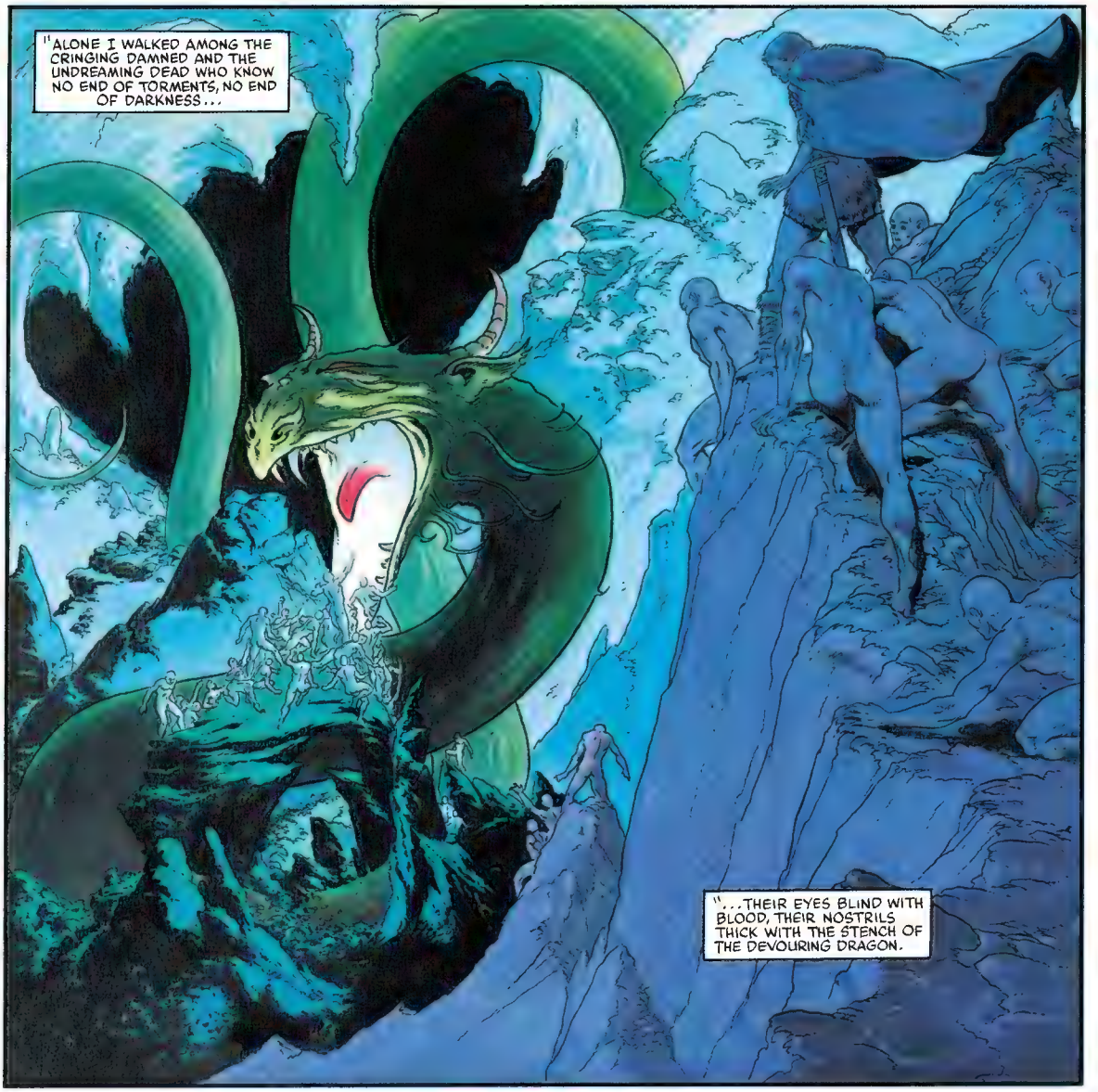
HERE BRIEF IS BEST--THOUGH MANY WERE THE DANGERS ALL ALONG THE WAY, BY AND BY THEY CAME, HALE AND HEARTY, TO VALHALLA'S GOLDEN BRIDGE, HIDDEN BEHIND A VEIL OF CLOUD...
MERCY ON US, PRINCE BALDER! THAT'S A CURIOUS CLAMOR I HEAR BUT CAN'T SEE?
IT'S NOT THE SOUND OF SPLASHING AFTER FROGS OR SLEDDING IN THE SNOW, FOR BY MY BOOTS THOSE ARE NOISES I'D QUITE REMEMBER.
'TIS THE CLASH OF LANCE ON LANCE, ODDBRAND, AND BLADE AGAINST BLADE, THE ROAR OF BATTLE.
B...B...BATTLE!? OH, PLEASE, MASTER GREYVAL, I'M AN OTTER OF MINIMUM COURAGE.
WAR FRIGHTENS ME MORE THAN A SNOWBALL IN THE EYE.
HA! NAY, FRIEND. 'TIS BUT MOCK BATTLE, THE SPORT OF THE NOBLE DEAD WHOSE WOUNDS HEAL BY NIGHTFALL WHEN ALLFATHER SETS FEASTS FOR THEM.
YOU MUST LET ME GO NOW, LITTLE FELLOW.
BUT *YOU* WEAR NO ENCHANTMENT SUCH AS KING ODIN WOVE FOR *US* TO VISIT THE HALL OF THE SLAIN WHILE WE'RE YET ALIVE. WAIT 'TIL OUR RETURN.
OH, HURRY BACK DO IF YOU PLEASE IF I MAY.
BALDER, I FEAR I'LL NEVER FIND MY FATHER 'MIDST THIS SWARMING HOST OF VALIANT SPIRITS.

LOOK FOR GRIM MAGNUS IN THE VANGUARD. THAT WAS EVER HIS PLACE IN THE VIGOR OF LIFE.
NAY. HERE AM I, ALONE ON THIS CRAG, ALOOF FROM THE ROISTEROUS BATTLE-PLAY.
FOR I HAVE NO WILL TO REJOICE AND JOIN IN ARMS...
...KNOWING THAT I LEFT BEHIND ME IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING A SON OF FAINT HEART.
GREYVAL, I KNOW ALL THAT PASSED AFTER MY SOUL FLED LIFE.
MY SPIRIT SAW YOU DANCE AMONG THE TROLLS.
HOW COULD YOU BETRAY US SO?

WHAT POET WILL EVER RAISE HIS HARP TO SING MY SON'S DEEDS HERE IN ODIN'S SHIELD-ROOFED HALL?
FATHER...
...GIVE ME YOUR COUNSEL AND FORGIVENESS, AND I WILL WIN FAME'S UNDYING GLORY.
AT LAST MY HEART SOARS!
AYE, YET YOU MAY REDEEM YOURSELF, MY SON, MAYHAP BECOME THE GREATEST OF US ALL.
KNOW THIS --THE *NORNS* IN THEIR FOREST CAN UNRIDDLE WHERE THE RAVEN BANNER'S HID.
BUT FIRST YOU MUST SOJOURN IN *HEL*, THE DARKEST REALM OF ALL, BITTER COLD AND FULL OF HORROR.
THERE YOU'LL SEE THE WRETCHED FATE OF HOLLOW LIVES MISSPENT IN COWARDICE AND MEAN SPIRIT.
SUCH WILL BE *YOUR* SORROWFUL LOT IF YOU FAIL TO MAKE VALOR YOUR HARD-EDGED SWORD AND VIRTUE YOUR SHIELD.

BALDER MAY NOT ATTEND YOU THERE.
YOU MUST GO ALONE, GREYVAL.
AT...AT ONCE, FATHER.
NOW, FAREWELL, MY SON AND HEIR.
ODIN SPEED THE DAY YOU SIT TO MY RIGHT HAND IN ETERNITY'S LOFTY MEAD-HALL.
I'LL 'WAIT THEE, DEAR FRIEND, AT THE GOLDEN BRIDGE.
MAY THY JOURNEY BE AS SWIFT...
"...AS THY HEART IS WILLING..."
ALONE.

"ALL ALONE I MOVED, A LIVING GHOST AMONG THE DEAD.
"I SAILED HEL'S STAGNANT RIVER, LOATHSOME AND FOUL AND FULL OF DROWNED SOULS LIKE A BROTH OF CORPSES.
"HERE THE AIR WAS DAMP WITH SLEET, THERE CUTTING COLD LIKE PINS OF ICE.
"I SHIVERED PAST THE SLAVERING HELLHOUND, GARM...
"...THROUGH SHADOW-HAUNTED CATACOMBS OF FLAME.

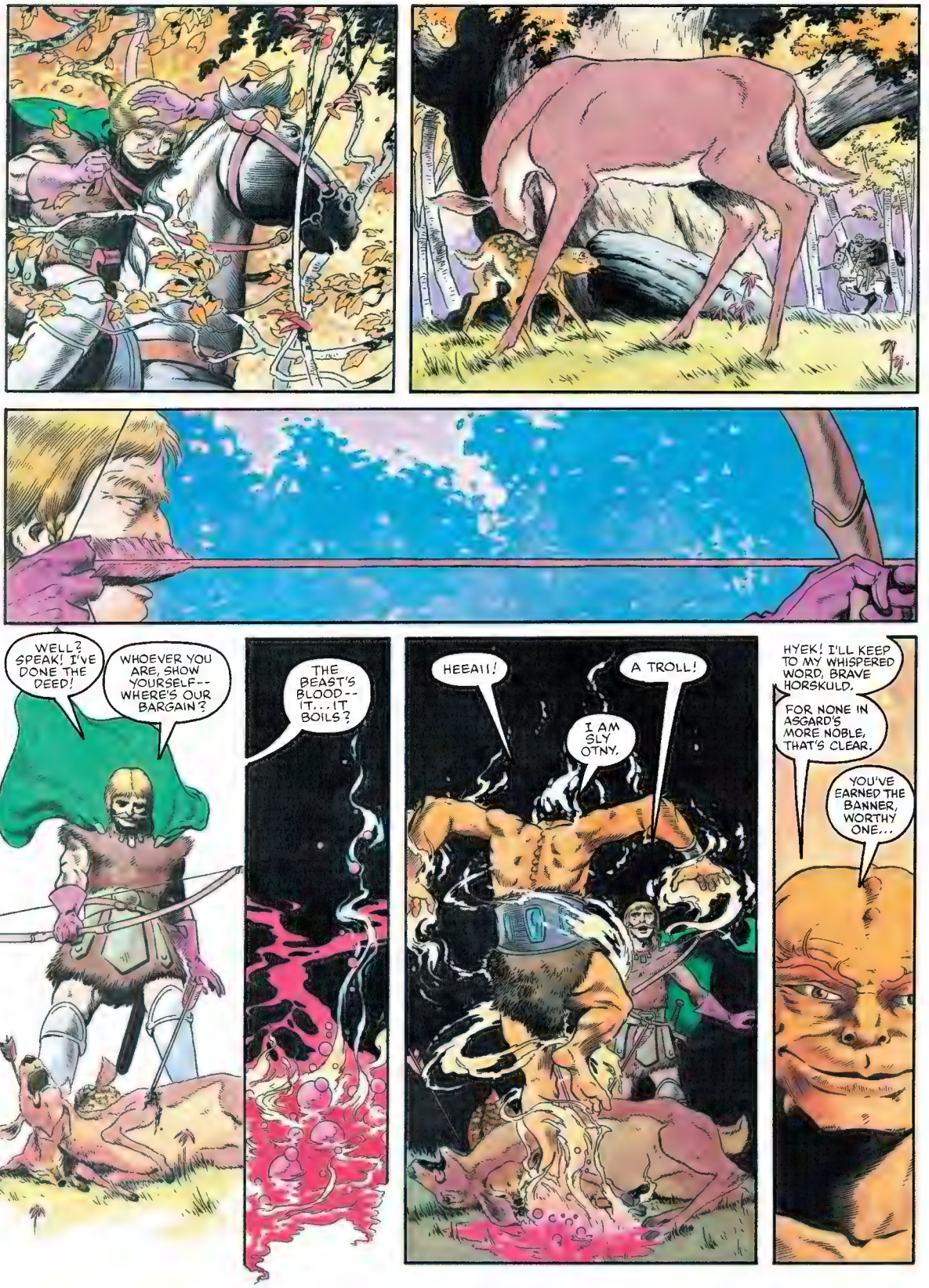

"ALONE I WALKED AMONG THE CRINGING DAMNED AND THE UNDREAMING DEAD WHO KNOW NO END OF TORMENTS, NO END OF DARKNESS...
"...THEIR EYES BLIND WITH BLOOD, THEIR NOSTRILS THICK WITH THE STENCH OF THE DEVOURING DRAGON.

"OH, THERE ARE HORRORS WITHOUT NAME IN THE DANK PITS OF HEL!

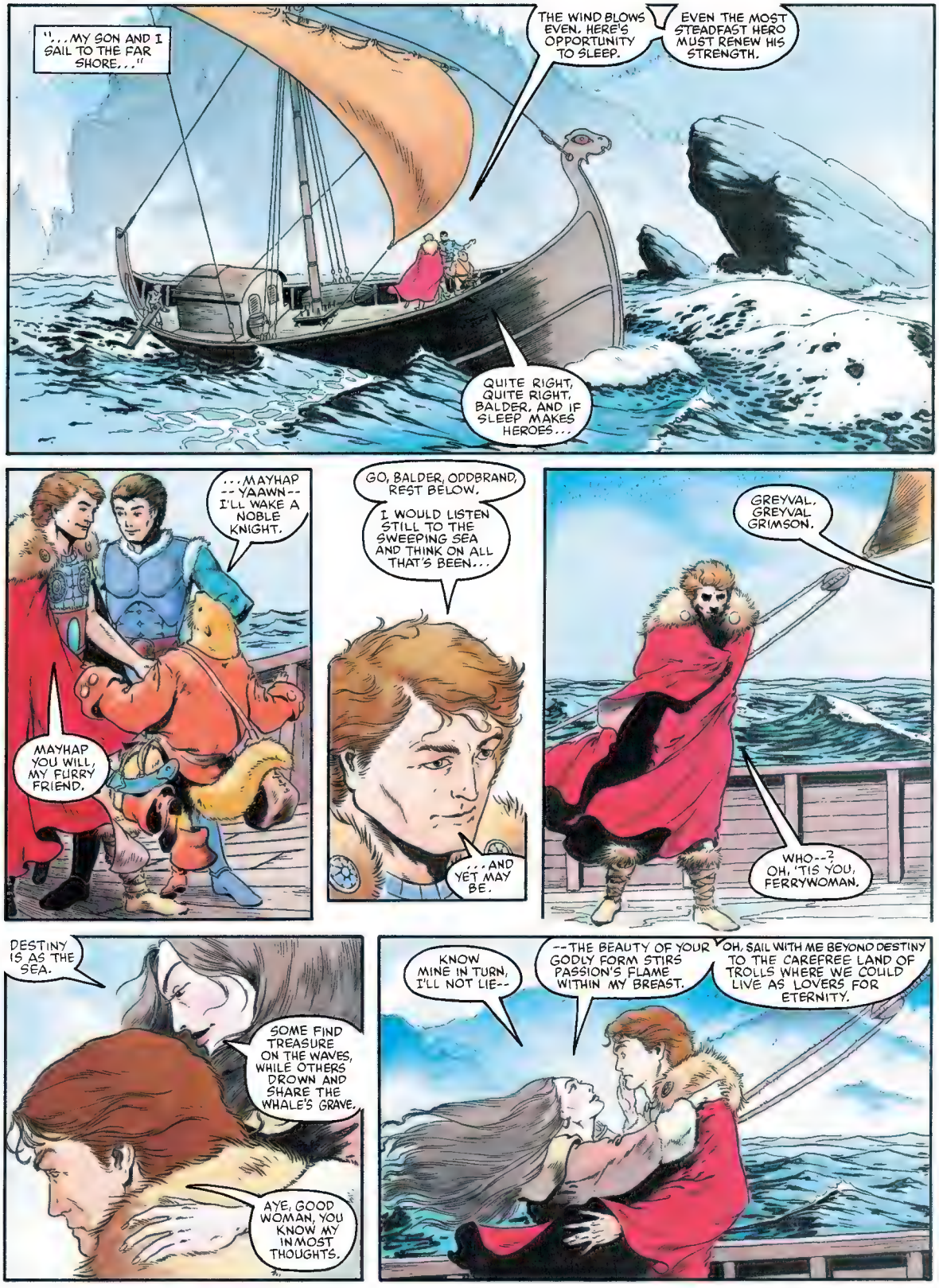
"BUT NONE MORE HARROWING THAN SHE WHO SITS THE INFERNAL THRONE--
"--DEATH'S GODDESS HELA, HALF BLACKNESS HALF FLESH.
"HER GAZE IS LIKE A GLACIER ON THE FROZEN SEA, ALL TRUTH AND TERRIBLE BEAUTY.
"SHE REVEALED TO ME THE ROTTING HEL-THING I WOULD BE IF MY COURAGE FAILED ME, AND I CRIED OUT--
"NEVER!"

NEVER!
I'VE SEEN ALL I WISH.
I SWEAR IT, BALDER, THE QUEEN OF HEL SHALL NEVER OWN MY SOUL.
I MUST STRAIGHTAWAY FIND THE NORNS AS MY FATHER BID.
FATE'S WEIRD SISTERS DWELL AT THE ROOTS OF THE WORLD TREE IN A FOREST BEYOND THE SEA OF MARMORA.
LET'S HASTEN...
"...BUT NOT FORGET OUR COMPANION AT THE FAR END OF THE GOLDEN BRIDGE..."
DEAR, DEARY!
SPEAR-MAIDS WITH EYES OF FIRE CARRYING D...D...DEAD WARRIORS--!
OH, DO ME NO HARM, VALKYRIE.
I'M BUT A POOR OTTER WITH THE LEAST LITTLE LEAST BIT OF PLUCK...
THOSE WERE SYGNET AND HER SWORD-SISTERS WHO PASSED OVER US NOW.
WHY DID SHE NOT HAIL ME?
SYGNET WOULD NOT STAY THEE ONE MOMENT'S PASSING FROM THY COURSE.
GREYVAL, THE SHIELD-MAIDS BEAR HEROES NEWLY-SLAIN.
IT CAN ONLY MEAN THE GIANTS, EMBOLDENED BY THE RAVEN BANNER, HARRY ASGARD ANEW BEFORE A FINAL GRAND ASSAULT.
BLESS MY BOOTS, HERE YOU ARE, NOBLE SIRS!
AND I WAS JUST SAYING TO MYSELF, YOU KNOW, THINKING AND WONDERING OUT LOUD WHETHER AND WHEN WE MIGHT BE...
...LEAVING THESE PARTS?
AT ONCE, FOR TIME WAITS ON NO GOD.

SO THEY THREE SET OFF FOR THE SEA OF MARMORA...
...AND SINCE THEIR JOURNEY WAS SWIFT AND SURE...
...LISTEN WHAT HAPPENED IN THE MEANWHILE TO HORSKULD IN THE GREENWOOD OUTSIDE THE GOLDEN REALM...
BAH! I'VE RIDDEN ABOUT AND ROUNDABOUT. NOT ONE CLUE.
CURSE ME FOR A MAID AT HER SPINDLE IF I CAN'T FIND IT ON MY OWN!
YET I'D SOONER FAIL THAN CONDESCEND TO SEEK ANOTHER GOD'S COUNSEL.
NAY. I'LL SUCCEED.
AND THEN PROUD SYGNET WILL RUE HER CHOICE OF MY FOOL COUSIN ABOVE MYSELF.
HARK, MAN-GOD OF ASGARD! I'LL WHISPER A SECRET, AND--HUSH!--NONE NEED KNOW. ONLY PROVE YOURSELF WORTHY.
WHO IS THAT?
WHO SPEAKS?
ALL ANSWERS IN DARK DUE TIME. FIRST--BEYOND THE GROVE A MOTHER DEER NESTLES HER FAWN. SLAY DOE AND DARLING BOTH--AND THE BANNER'S YOURS.
THE BANNER!


WELL? SPEAK! I'VE DONE THE DEED!
WHOEVER YOU ARE, SHOW YOURSELF-- WHERE'S OUR BARGAIN?
THE BEAST'S BLOOD -- IT... IT BOILS?
HEEA11!
A TROLL!
I AM SLY OTNY.
HYEK! I'LL KEEP TO MY WHISPERED WORD, BRAVE HORSKULD.
FOR NONE IN ASGARD'S MORE NOBLE, THAT'S CLEAR.
YOU'VE EARNED THE BANNER, WORTHY ONE...

THE SEA OF MARMORA.
AT LAST.
MERCY ON US! HOWEVER WILL WE CROSS?
I'LL HEW A RAFT OF MOUNTAIN PINES--
NAY, LOOK!
GOOD FORTUNE, A FERRYMAN'S COTTAGE.
HULLO, IS THERE SOMEONE ABOUT?
HUSH, VISITORS.
ODIN SAVE YOURSELVES KINDLY, GOOD STRANGERS.
AND THYSELF AND THE CHILD, GOOD WOMAN.
PRAY TELL, THY BOAT--
--IS IT FOR HIRE?
AYE, THAT IT IS.
IT'S A SOUND VESSEL, YOU'RE CERTAIN? NO BOTTOM-HOLES OR LEAKY PLANKS, HAS IT?
I AM A WIDOW WHO FILLS MY CUPBOARD WITH THE CHARITY OF PASSENGERS.
COME NOW...


"...MY SON AND I SAIL TO THE FAR SHORE..."
THE WIND BLOWS EVEN. HERE'S OPPORTUNITY TO SLEEP.
EVEN THE MOST STEADFAST HERO MUST RENEW HIS STRENGTH.
QUITE RIGHT, QUITE RIGHT, BALDER, AND IF SLEEP MAKES HEROES...
...MAYHAP --YAAWN-- I'LL WAKE A NOBLE KNIGHT.
MAYHAP YOU WILL, MY FURRY FRIEND.
GO, BALDER, ODDBRAND, REST BELOW.
I WOULD LISTEN STILL TO THE SWEEPING SEA AND THINK ON ALL THAT'S BEEN...
...AND YET MAY BE.
GREYVAL, GREYVAL GRIMSON.
WHO--? OH, 'TIS YOU, FERRYWOMAN.
DESTINY IS AS THE SEA.
SOME FIND TREASURE ON THE WAVES, WHILE OTHERS DROWN AND SHARE THE WHALE'S GRAVE.
AYE, GOOD WOMAN, YOU KNOW MY INMOST THOUGHTS.
KNOW MINE IN TURN, I'LL NOT LIE--
--THE BEAUTY OF YOUR GODLY FORM STIRS PASSION'S FLAME WITHIN MY BREAST.
OH, SAIL WITH ME BEYOND DESTINY TO THE CAREFREE LAND OF TROLLS WHERE WE COULD LIVE AS LOVERS FOR ETERNITY.

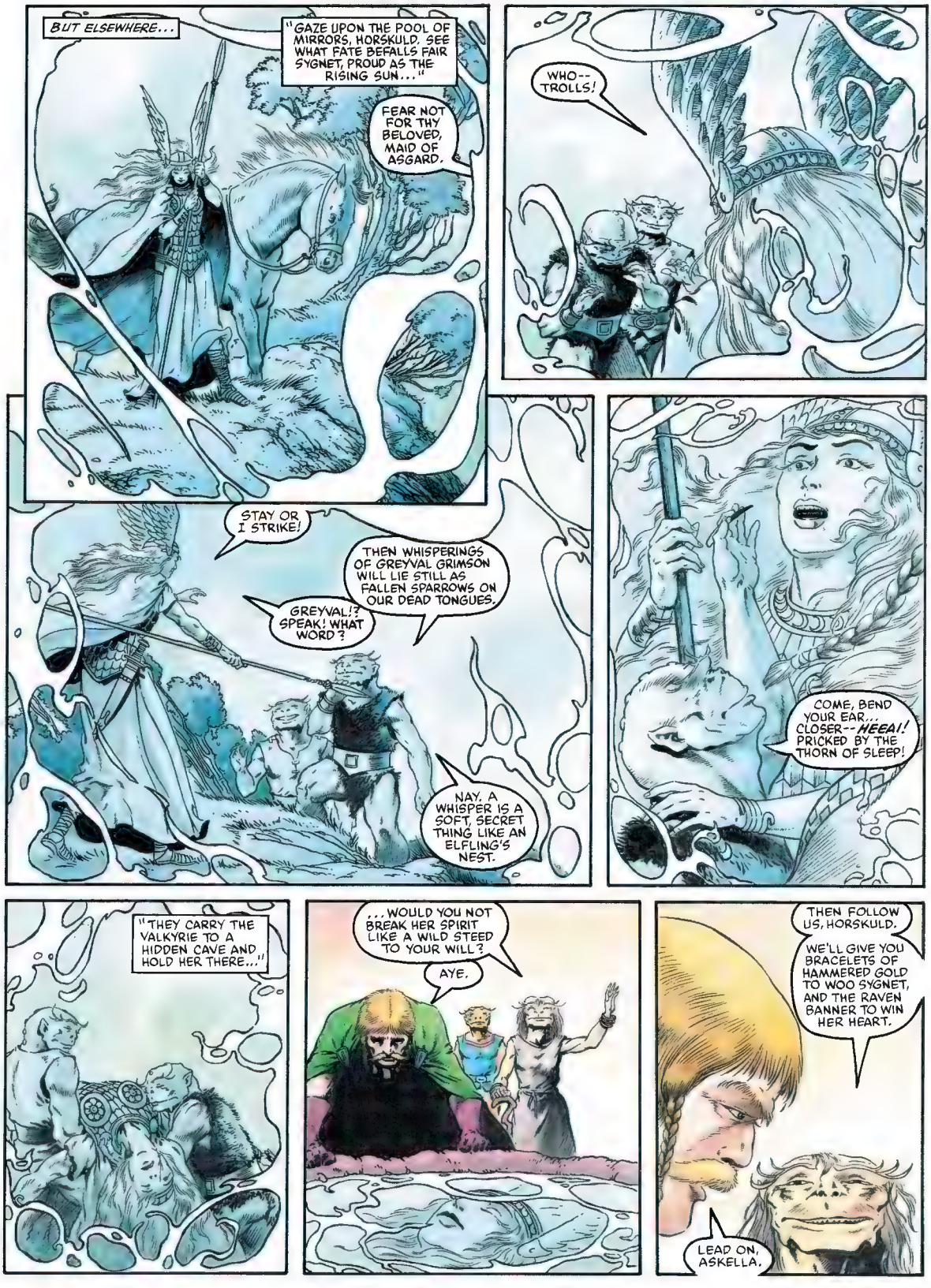
WOMAN, WHAT ARE THESE MAD WORDS?
NOT MADNESS, GODLING...
...BUT THE MEANS TO BREAK THY WILL!
ASKELLA!
THEN YOU'RE NO WIDOW, TROLLWITCH!
NOR I A CHILD-- HYEK! GIVE IT UP, GREYVAL!
SVIN!
FOOLISH GOD, GIVE IT UP!
STAY BACK. I WISH YOU NO HARM--
GIVE IT--
NEVER!
UPPNGH-- NYA!!! A MORTAL THRUST!
YOU'VE SLAIN SVIN!

HAOOOW
CONFOUND YOU, ASGARDIAN! YOUR LIFE'S NOW FORFEIT TO MY WITCHCRAFT!
WIND GIANT, WIND GIANT, HOWL FORTH FREE, BY THE RUNE OF RAW WINTER ASKELLA SUMMONS THEE!
WRACK THIS CRAFT AND RACK THIS GODLING'S SOUL-- TO DARKEST HEL WITH HIM!
HAAOOOOOOOOWL

HAAOOOOOL
HEEAI!
GREYVAL! THE SEA POUNDS, THE WIND BURSTS!
'TIS A TEMPEST!
I'VE BROUGHT THIS TROLL'S CURSE ON US, GOOD BALDER.
KEEP BELOW--SAVE YOURSELF AND ODDBRAND!
WHAT!?
AND LEAVE THEE TO THE DRIVING STORM?
NAY, FRIEND.
ODIN PRESERVE US!
THE MAST SPLITS ASUNDER!
AND THE SEA LASHES LIKE STRAPS OF RAW LEATHER!
HAHAHAHAHA
HOLD FAST TO THIS DRIFTING TIMBER OR THE WAVES WILL CRUSH US!

OH, BOTHER AND NONSENSE, WHAT A NIGHTMARE, WHAT A FRIGHT!
I DREAMED OUR BOAT WAS LOST IN A MAELSTROM AND MASTER GREYVAL SWEPT TO THE FOAM ALONG WITH PRINCE BAL--
MERCY! IT'S TRUE!
OH, HELP!
OH, HELP AND HURRYNGHLUGH
gluug glug
DEAR ME-- GLUUG-- DEAR YOU! ALL'S LOST, ALL'S --KOFF--LOST!
HYEK! YOUR HOLLOW CORPSES WILL CRAWL WITH SEAWORMS...
... WHILE I'LL HIE ME TO WIN OTHER SOULS FOR THE KINGDOM OF TROLLS.

DEAR, DEARY, DEARIER, AND DEARIEST!
I'M WATERFULLY WOEBEGONE... WE'LL ALL BE DROWNED...UNLESS ...OH, I WISH I WISH--
A BOTTLE IN MY BAG!
DO HURRY DO HURRY UNSTOP THE CORK UNCORK THE STOP AND--
THERE! IT WORKS! IT WORKS!
PINECONES! THAT PUTS AN END TO THE WINDY DEVIL OR DOESN'T IT?
AND HERE'S OUR DESTINATION, THE FAR SHORE OF MARMORA.
WHEREVER DIDST THOU GET THAT WONDERFUL FLASK, FRIEND?
IN MY FATHER'S BAG OF WONDERS, PRINCE BALDER.
IT'S A SPECIAL SORT OF MAGICAL BAG THAT FILLS UP WITH WHAT IT OUGHT TO BE FULL OF ALMOST ALWAYS WHENEVER YOU PUT YOUR MIND TO WISHING FOR IT.
ONLY I WAS SO FEARFUL OF THE WAVES I NEARLY FORGOT TO WISH INTO IT.
WELL, ODDBRAND, YOU'RE A WISHFUL SORT OF HERO AFTER ALL.
A WISHFUL SORT OF HERO! DO YOU THINK SO REALLY, MASTER GREYVAL?


BUT ELSEWHERE...
"GAZE UPON THE POOL OF MIRRORS, HORSKULD. SEE WHAT FATE BEFALLS FAIR SYGNET, PROUD AS THE RISING SUN..."
FEAR NOT FOR THY BELOVED, MAID OF ASGARD.
WHO-- TROLLS!
STAY OR I STRIKE!
THEN WHISPERINGS OF GREYVAL GRIMSON WILL LIE STILL AS FALLEN SPARROWS ON OUR DEAD TONGUES.
GREYVAL!? SPEAK! WHAT WORD?
NAY. A WHISPER IS A SOFT, SECRET THING LIKE AN ELFLING'S NEST.
COME, BEND YOUR EAR... CLOSER--HEEAI! PRICKED BY THE THORN OF SLEEP!
"THEY CARRY THE VALKYRIE TO A HIDDEN CAVE AND HOLD HER THERE..."
...WOULD YOU NOT BREAK HER SPIRIT LIKE A WILD STEED TO YOUR WILL?
AYE.
THEN FOLLOW US, HORSKULD.
WE'LL GIVE YOU BRACELETS OF HAMMERED GOLD TO WOO SYGNET, AND THE RAVEN BANNER TO WIN HER HEART.
LEAD ON, ASKELLA.

IF YOU PLEASE IF I MAY, PRINCE BALDER, IS THERE NO END TO THE NORN FOREST?
FOR I WAS JUST DREAMING, YOU KNOW, HOW NICE WOULD BE A BELLYFUL'S BOWLFUL OF MOIST SEA URCHINS JUST ABOUT NOW.
WE NEAR JOURNEY'S END, THIS LAST WAY LEADS TO THE NORNS OF DESTINY.
HUGINN, MUNINN? THE ALL-FATHER'S RAVENS!
BATTLE IS ABOUT TO BREAK? I DID SUSPECT THE GIANTS OF SO SWIFT A MOVE.
THE ALL-FATHER RECALLS ME TO COUNCIL OF WAR.
THOSE ARE HIS VERY WORDS?
MUST YOU LEAVE ME?
WAR!?
'TIS ODIN'S WILL. BUT THOU ART PROVEN MOST VALIANT IN SOUL, GREYVAL.
AND THOU HAST A WISHFUL SORT OF HERO FOR THY PAGE.
QUITE RIGHT, QUITE RIGHT. YOU'LL FIND NO MORE ABLE ATTENDANT, MASTER GREYVAL, NOR MORE FAITHFUL.
THAT IS IF YOU'LL HAVE ME... UH ...THAT IS??
AYE, ODDBRAND OTTER. YOU SHALL BE MY SQUIRE-AT-ARMS.
AT ARMS? DEAR ME, OH YES, QUITE RIGHT.
AS FOR YOU, BRAVE BALDER... KIND BALDER, FAREWELL.

COME, ODDBRAND. BALDER COUNSELED THAT THIS ROOT WILL LEAD US...
...TO THE WORLD TREE, YGGDRASILL, THE MIGHTY ASH.
NOW WE MUST TRAVEL DOWNWARDS AND YET FARTHER DOWNWARDS, PAST THESE GNARLED AND KNOTTED ROOTS...
...DEEP DOWN TO THE SACRED WELL OF WYRD, THE SPRING OF DESTINY...

...HERE TO LEARN THE FATE THE NORNS PREPARE FOR ME.
WEAVE AND SPIN. LIFE'S THREADS BEGIN. WHERE WILL THEY END? WEAVE, TWINE, AND SPIN.
ALL HAIL, GREYVAL, SON OF GRIM MAGNUS.
A RIDDLE, A RUNE--
THREE PATHS LEAD FROM THESE CAVERNS.
THE FIRST, MOST SWIFT, WENDS SAFELY TO YOUR HOMESTEAD, WHERE YOU'LL ENJOY ETERNAL LIFE-- IN EVERLASTING SHAME.
THE SECOND-- TO THE RAVEN BANNER, NEAR YET FAR.
FOR YOUR COURAGE NEWLY FORGED IS NOT YET TRIED.
RASH AND RUEFUL IS THIS ROAD.
THE THIRD PATH LEADS TO YOUR BELOVED BRIDE.
KNOW, SHE IS PRISONER SOUTHWARDS IN THE LAND OF ROCK TROLLS.
SYGNET HELD! WHAT CHOICE IS THAT? I GO TO RESCUE HER--
AND SO YOU CHOOSE THE LONGEST WAY, BUT SHORTEST IN THE END.

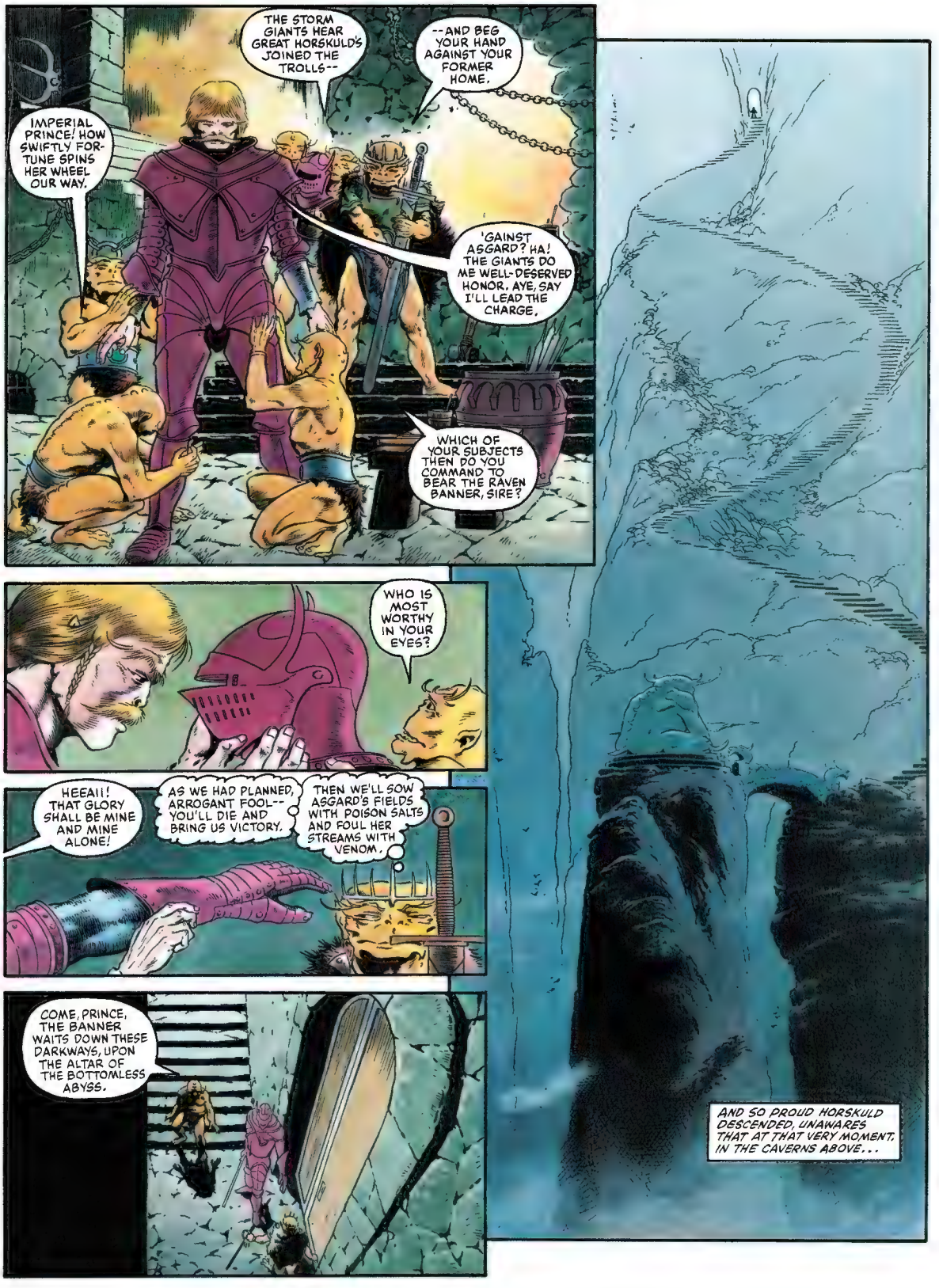
YOU CHOOSE A HERO'S DESTINY.
I'M OFF--!
BUT TARRY ONE WORD MORE.
ALLFATHER ODIN GRANTS THEE GULLINBURSTI, HIS MAGIC BOAR...
...WHOSE GOLDEN BRISTLES LIGHT THE DARKEST GLOOM...
...WHO'S FLEET ON LAND AND FAST AT SEA AND FLIES THE AIR.
THE GOLDEN BOAR WAITS DOWN THE PATH YOU'VE CHOSEN.
HASTEN, FOR THIS VERY HOUR I HEAR THE GIANTS GRINDING IRON BLADES AT THEIR SPARKING WHETSTONE!
AND HORSKULD--
HUSH, SISTER! HE WILL LEARN OF HORSKULD WHEN TIME WILLS.
COME, ODDBRAND. WE STRIDE TO MIGHTY DEEDS.
MASTER GREYVAL, IF YOU PLEASE, I MEAN, I...
...WELL, ROCK TROLLS AND ALL, I... MUST CONFESS--
THAT YOU ARE FRIGHTENED?
HERE'S GULLINBURSTI! TRUST ME, ODDBRAND, ONLY A FOOL LACKS FEAR. A HERO CONQUERS IT.
THEN CONQUER IT I WILL... PERHAPS...AS SOON AS WE'RE-- ;GULP!--ON SOLID GROUND AGAIN...

NOW ALL THIS WHILE IN THE KINGDOM OF THE TROLLS...
COME, HORSKULD! HERE'S MORE MEAD, OUR HONORED GUEST.
A CHALLENGE! WHO CAN DRAIN THE HORN-O'-PLENTY IN ONE DRAFT?
HA! GIVE ME THAT-- GLAARGH!
THOR, THE LORD OF THUNDER'S NOT HALF THE TRENCHERMAN AS WE HAVE HERE.
'TIS YOU SHOULD BE THE PRINCE OF GODS, HORSKULD.
A FEAT! A FEAT!
MOST NOBLE, OH MOST GLORIOUS, MOST WORTHY.
A PLEDGE! A PLEDGE UPON THE DRINKING HORN! RENOUNCE THE DAYLIGHT AND BE PRINCE OF TROLLS!
PRINCE HORSKULD ...SOUNDS NOT BAD...
PRINCE HORSKULD, KEEPER OF THE RAVEN BANNER!
PEERLESS PRINCE AND WARRIOR KNIGHT!
AND MAYHAP KING OF ASGARD SOON, AS YOU DESERVE, QUEEN SYGNET BY YOUR SIDE.
AYE, LUCK OF THE RUNES, I'LL STAY!
HEEA!! THE BELLS! THE HARPS!
SOUND THE SILVER HORNS OF ELFLAND FOR OUR GRACIOUS LORD AND LIEGE!
BUT ELSEWHERE AND SOON AFTER...
OH, MASTER GREYVAL, IF OTTERS WERE MEANT TO FLY SHOULDN'T YOU THINK WE'D ALL BE BORN WITH WINGS LIKE WOODPECKERS, OR CUCKOO BIRDS? NO, I--
HUSH, ODDBRAND, THE ROCK TROLLS DWELL AN ARROW-SHOT BELOW.
BUT, MASTER, LOOK! A ST... ST... STORM GIANT STANDS GUARD, SWORD A'SWAY--!?

I COME FOR MY VALKYRIE BRIDE!
YOU COME TO DIE, WHEY-FACED GODLING--
--BY THE SAME COLD STEEL THAT SPILLED GRIM MAGNUS' BLOOD LIKE THE JUICE OF OVERRIPE BERRIES.
FOR SNORTH HOLDS THESE CRAGS 'TIL ASGARD FALLS TO HIS BROTHERS!
HANG YOU, VILLAIN! I'LL HAVE SYGNET--
CLA-
AAANNG
--AND WREAK MY FATHER'S VENGEANCE IN THE BARGAIN!
THE HILLS! MASTER GREYVAL, THE HILLS ARE MOVING!
ROCK TROLLS!
HA HA HA HA
THEY'LL KILL US--
FEAR NOT, SQUIRE, FOR I AM A GOD AND THE SON OF MIGHTY HEROES!

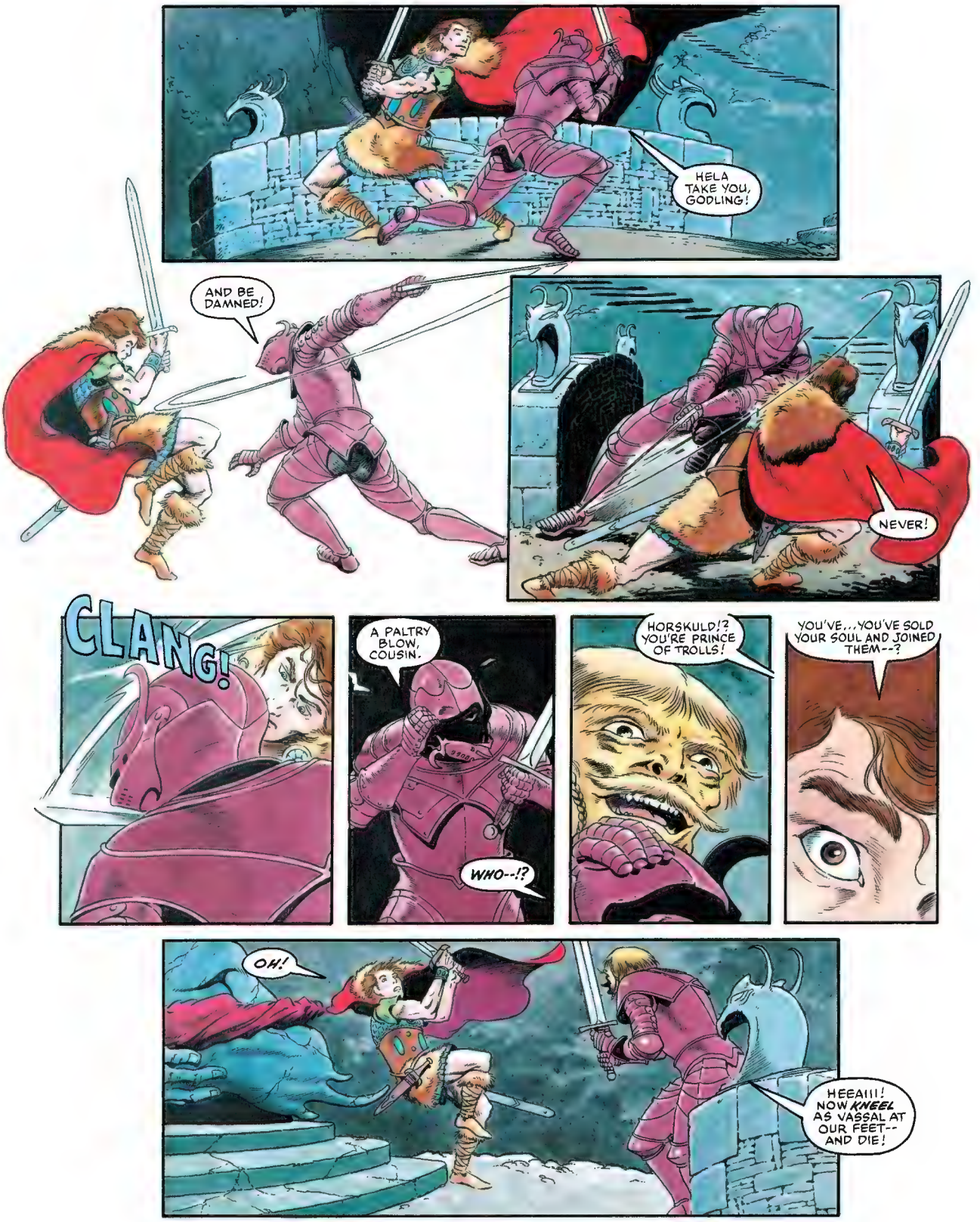
NYEEK! FLEE!
FLEE!
GREYVAL!
THAT'S SYGNET'S VOICE?
IN THERE!
BELOVED!
OH, HUSBAND, HOLD ME FAST.
ALAS, I WAS A HASTY FOOL TO SEND YOU OFF.
GIVE UP THIS ILL-STARRED QUEST.
TAKE ME BACK TO OUR HOMESTEAD, AND LET US LIVE AS LOVERS--
BUT THE BANNER--?
HULLO?
HERE'S A TORCH IF YOU PLEASE, FOR A TRUE SQUIRE EVER LIGHTS HIS MASTER'S WAY--
THAT... THAT MISSHAPEN SHADOW?

BY THE SHADOW'S TRUTH!
A QUEER AND BASE ILLUSION-- ASKELLA!
LET ME BE, LET ME BE... THIS KEY... HUNPH...THE DOOR...
GREYVAL!
FAIREST BRIDE!
LET ME ...UNPH ...BE... MERCY! MERCY!
AYE, AS YOU'VE SHOWN MERCY, SO'S MERCY YOURS, WITCH.
NYAII!
INTO MY BAG WITH THE KEY...
...AND WITH A WISH IT'S WHISKED TO MAGIC WORLDS NEVER TO OPEN THIS DOOR AGAIN.
HAD I RETRIEVED THE BANNER WHEN MY FATHER FELL, THE GIANTS WOULD NOT DARE STORM ASGARD SO SOON AGAIN.
COUNTLESS SUMMERS' DALLIANCE THEN WERE OURS. BUT NOW--
MY WARRIOR, OUR LOVE WEARS NOT THE PALE, WEARY RAGS OF TIME, BUT THE GOLDEN RAIMENT OF ETERNITY.
THOUGH I FOREGO THE CLOSE WARMTH OF YOUR BREATH, FOREVER, LOVE...
...OUR SOULS SHALL BE AS ONE.
OFF NOW! THE BANNER'S HID WITHIN THE ABYSS OF SHADOWS IN THE KINGDOM OF THE TROLLS.
SO BRAGGED THE WITCH.
YOU MUST RIDE ESCORT TO MY LADY SYGNET, ODDBRAND, AND BE EVER BRAVE.
AS BRAVE AS YOU'S MY WISHFUL THOUGHT.
FAREWELL!
HAIL AND FAREWELL, MY HEART AND SOUL.
FAREWELL, OH DEAR, FAREWELL...


IMPERIAL PRINCE! HOW SWIFTLY FORTUNE SPINS HER WHEEL OUR WAY.
THE STORM GIANTS HEAR GREAT HORSKULD'S JOINED THE TROLLS--
--AND BEG YOUR HAND AGAINST YOUR FORMER HOME.
'GAINST ASGARD? HA! THE GIANTS DO ME WELL-DESERVED HONOR, AYE, SAY I'LL LEAD THE CHARGE.
WHICH OF YOUR SUBJECTS THEN DO YOU COMMAND TO BEAR THE RAVEN BANNER, SIRE?
WHO IS MOST WORTHY IN YOUR EYES?
HEEAII! THAT GLORY SHALL BE MINE AND MINE ALONE!
AS WE HAD PLANNED, ARROGANT FOOL-- YOU'LL DIE AND BRING US VICTORY.
THEN WE'LL SOW ASGARD'S FIELDS WITH POISON SALTS AND FOUL HER STREAMS WITH VENOM.
COME, PRINCE, THE BANNER WAITS DOWN THESE DARKWAYS, UPON THE ALTAR OF THE BOTTOMLESS ABYSS.
AND SO PROUD HORSKULD DESCENDED, UNAWARES THAT AT THAT VERY MOMENT, IN THE CAVERNS ABOVE...

WE ARE ARRIVED!
SHED YOUR RADIANCE, GULLINBURSTI!
DISPEL THIS CAVES ILLUSIONS!
NYAII! LIGHT BURSTS LIKE THE CURSED SUN DANCING ON THE GOLDEN TOWERS OF THE GODS!
NOW I SEE THE TRUTH--THESE ARE NO PLEASURE HALLS BUT THORN-RIDDEN WASTES.
FOR YOUR LIFE, TROLL! THE ABYSS OF SHADOWS--?
--URGH-- BELOW THESE CAVERNS... BUT OUR PRINCE... GUARDS THE RAVEN BANNER--
NAY, BY ALL THAT'S HOLY, GREYVAL SHALL REDEEM IT!
THEN HORSKULD'S NOT YET BEEN HERE.
GOLDEN TUSK, I CHARGE YOU TO KEEP THE TROLLS AT BAY 'TIL I CALL UPON YOU...
"...FROM BELOW..."
HERE'S THE BANNER! HAIEE! A CURSE ON ASGARD!
HORSKULD, YOU'VE PROVEN WORTHY BE-YOND ALL PRAISE!

TURN ASIDE, TROLL PRINCE! TURN AND FLEE!
THE RAVEN BANNER'S MINE ORDAINED BY DESTINY.
NYAIIARGH
TAKE WARNING, RECKLESS WARRIOR! I'M BOUND BY SACRED OATH TO MY FATHER'S SPIRIT...
UNPH!
...AND TO MY BRIDE OF LIFE! I'LL NOT FAIL!


HELA TAKE YOU, GODLING!
AND BE DAMNED!
NEVER!
CLANG!
A PALTRY BLOW, COUSIN.
WHO--!?
HORSKULD!? YOU'RE PRINCE OF TROLLS!
YOU'VE...YOU'VE SOLD YOUR SOUL AND JOINED THEM--?
OH!
HEEAIII! NOW *KNEEL* AS VASSAL AT OUR FEET-- AND DIE!

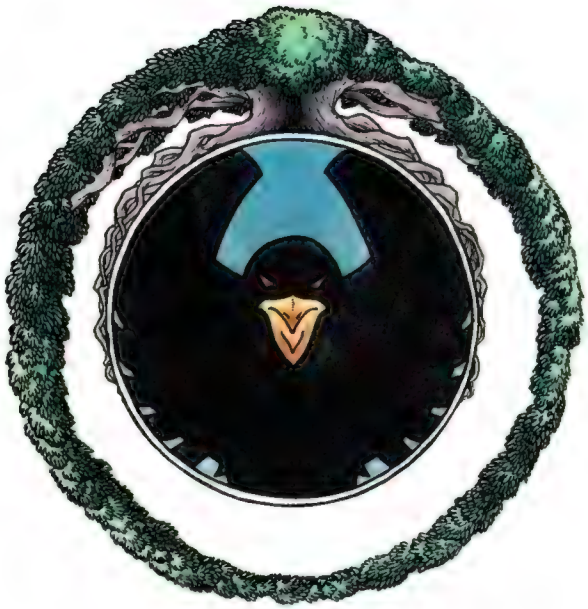
THERE IS BLOOD ON THE MOON TONIGHT.
AYE, HORSKULD, ONE OF US MUST DIE.
BUT BY MY SHORTSWORD--
--'TIS NOT I!
THE LUCK OF THE RUNES BE WITH YOU, COUSIN!
NYAIiiii
THE BOTTOMLESS ABYSS IS FILLED WITH BLOOD.
COME, GULLINBURSTI! URGENT DEEDS YET NEED DOING!
HIE THE RAVEN BANNER TO ASGARD!

A SONG OF SHARP-HONED STEEL, FOES OF HEAVEN!
'TIL DAWN'S GREY WOLF ENGORGES ON THE MOON AND ASGARD FALLS TO SHADOW AND OBLIVION!
I FEAR THESE ARE NO IDLE BOASTS, BRAVE BALDER.
FAITH, FATHER. GREYVAL SHALL NOT FAIL.
OUR END DRAWS NIGH SO SOON AS OUR SWORN FOES UNFURL THE RAVEN BANNER TO THE WIND.
THEY'LL DRIVE US TO DISASTROUS DEFEAT.
THE GLOOM OF NIGHT BODES DOOM ON ASGARD.
COME GLEAM OF DAY, THESE FIELDS WILL RUN WITH THE GORE OF GODS.
FOR EVEN AS I SPEAK THE PRINCE OF TROLLS RIDES TO DO BATTLE UNDER THE ENCHANTED PENNON.
BEHOLD, GOD BROTHERS! THE RAVEN BANNER!
VICTORY THIS NIGHT IS OURS!
BRAZEN DECEIVER! HE LIES!
FORWARD, MY GOLDEN KNIGHTS!

A ROUT! A ROUT! THE GIANTS FLEE!
WAR-FELLOWS, SOUND THE HORNS OF VICTORY!
PINECONES, PRINCE BALDER, THE BATTLE'S WON! DID I NOT PLY MY STEEL BOLDLY?
AYE, A TRIBUTE ...TO THY MASTER.
COME LET US PAY DUE HOMAGE TO OUR FALLEN FRIEND.
OH, LOOK! ALREADY THE VALKYRIE--
--DID YOU SAY FALLEN? MASTER GREYVAL?
OH DEAR, BUT THIS SIGHT MAKES ME SORROWFUL WITH SADNESS.
LADY SYGNET, THY BELOVED'S DEATH IS ASGARD'S SALVATION--
--AYE, AND OUR ETERNAL GLORY, BALDER. I ASK NO GREATER CONSOLATION.
NOW, GRACIOUS FRIEND, I ENTRUST THE BANNER TO THY KEEPING, 'TIL THE SON CONCEIVED UPON MY WEDDING NIGHT IS BORN TO CLAIM IT AS HIS BIRTHRIGHT.

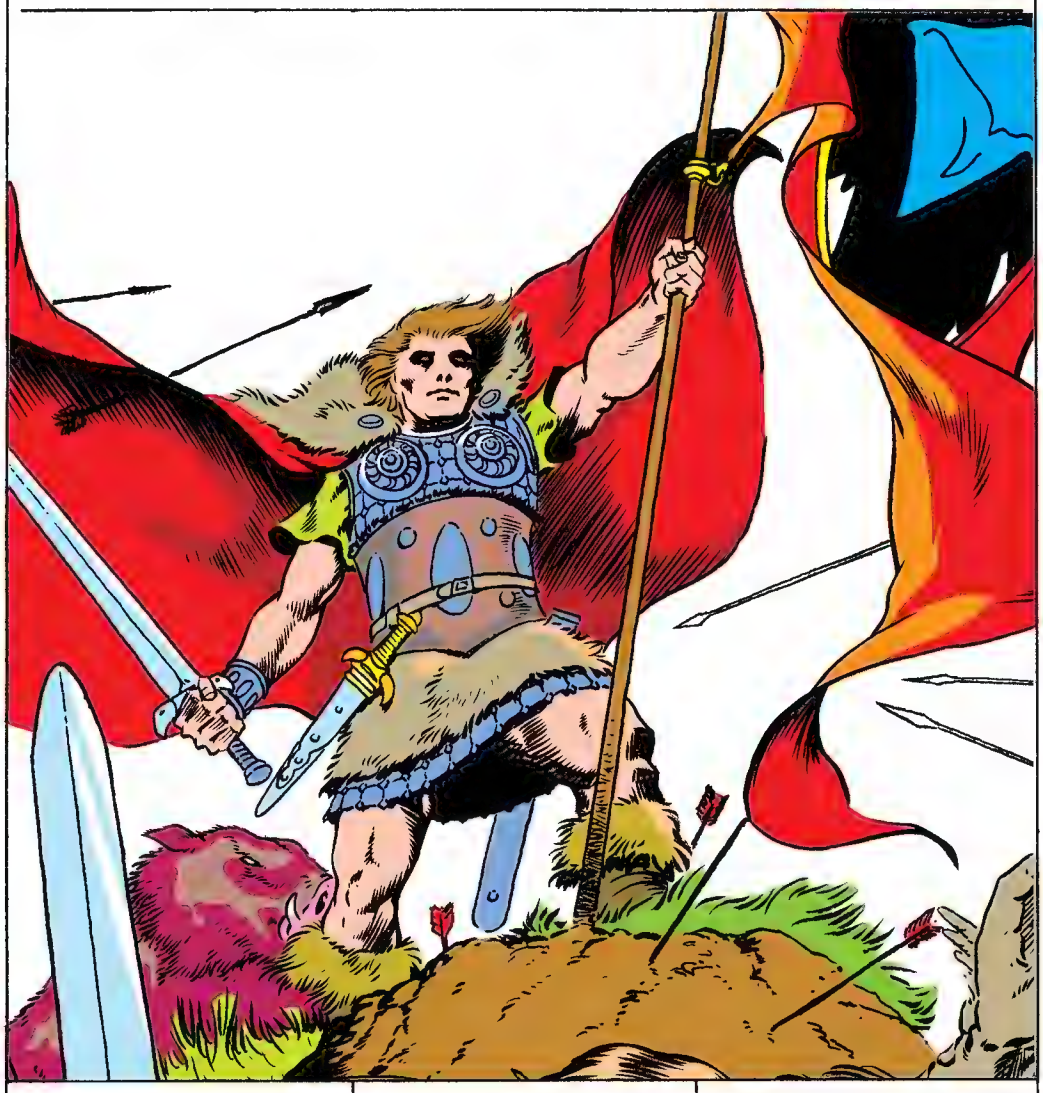
FAREWELL, DEAR MASTER GREYVAL, WHO TAUGHT ME LOVE AND BRAVERY.
I HAIL THEE AND FAREWELL, GREYVAL GRIMSON, HERO OF THE GODS AND SOUL OF COURAGE!
TO VALHALLA!
FLY THUNDERHOOF! THY MISTRESS SYGNET BIDS THEE HIE ALOFT ASGARD'S NOBLEST BURDEN...
...WHOSE LOVE WORE NOT THE PALE, WEARY RAGS OF TIME, BUT THE GOLDEN RAIMENT OF ETERNITY.
HERE ENDS THE RAVEN BANNER AND THE DEATH OF GREYVAL GRIMSON, A TALE OF ASGARD.

FANTASY • MYTHOLOGY



Marvel Age #26 (May 1985) reveals how Alan Zelenetz & Charles Vess' Warriors Three collaboration for *Marvel Fanfare* #13 brought about *The Raven Banner* graphic novel,

UNFURLING THE RAVEN BANNER



by **Steve Ringgenberg**

Before the Bronze Age, before the fabled Golden Age, and long, long, *long* before the current Asgardian adventures of the mighty **Thor** during the Marvel Age, there was an Age of Gods and Heroes in Asgard. In the graphic novel, *The Raven Banner* (coming your way in April), artist **Charles Vess** and writer **Alan Zelenetz** seek to recreate the excitement and fairy tale wonder of this magical epoch by telling the story of one **Greyval**, a man of Asgard (although, as **Alan Zelenetz** cannily pointed out: "the men of Asgard are *gods*.").

Alan Zelenetz is a name astute Marvelites will recognize immediately as the writer of **MOON KNIGHT**, **THE ALIEN LEGION**, **KULL**, and **KING CONAN**. The name **Charles Vess** may seem somewhat less familiar, but that's only because **Vess's** output for Marvel has so far been rather slim: A single **Dr. Strange** story and a **Warriors Three** tale in **MARVEL FANFARE**, a few black and white and color fantasy stories printed in **EPIC**, a **SPIDER-MAN** cover, and a **KING CONAN** cover done in collaboration with his friend **Michael Kaluta**. It was the second of the **MARVEL FANFARE** stories, however, that led directly to the creation of **THE RAVEN BANNER** graphic novel. As **Alan Zelenetz** told the story: "I had gone in to **Ann Nocenti** asking what she needed for **MARVEL FANFARE**, and she said there's this fellow named **Charlie Vess** who wants to draw the World Tree. Want to do a story about the World Tree and **the Warriors Three**? I called **Charlie** at his apartment, and

the story's mythological underpinnings in the *Orkneyinga Saga*, how one approaches Asgardian death and the artistic intertwining of Arthur Rackham and Jack Kirby.

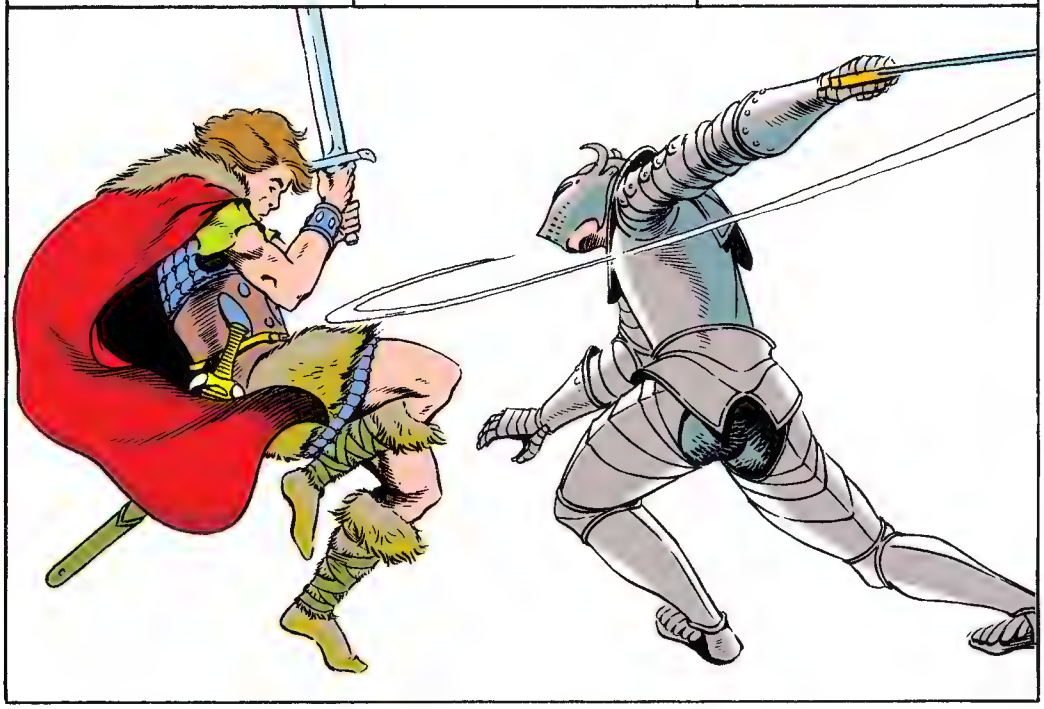
he wanted to draw the World Tree; he made that very clear . . . We did that short story, then **Charlie** left me a little note at the end of the page asking if I'd be interested in getting together for a full-length graphic novel."

This was a creative union obviously looked upon kindly by the Gods of Asgard, for **Vess** and **Zelenetz** quickly found an editor, **Ralph Macchio**, and just as quickly got an okay from Head Honcho **Jim Shooter**, before they had much besides an idea and a strong desire to work together. Quoth **Shooter**: "Sure. Do it. Give me a plot."

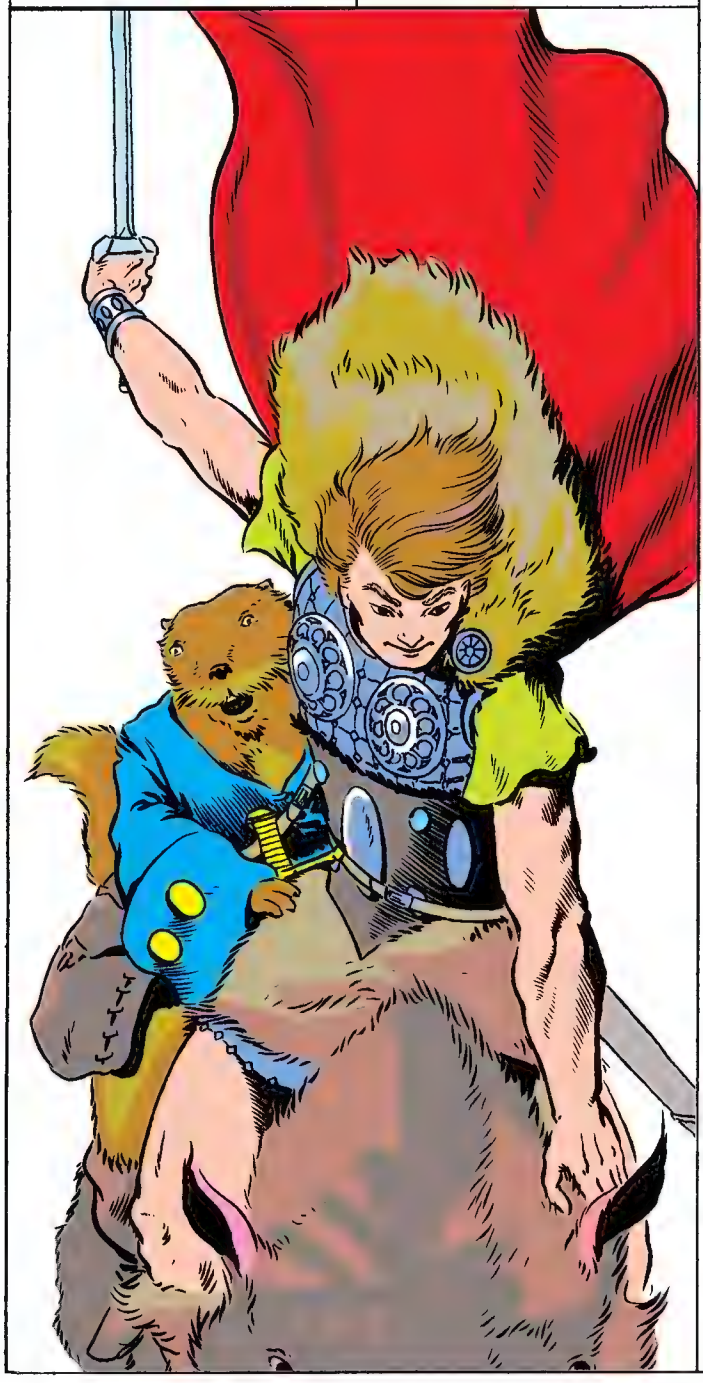
The actual plot used in **THE RAVEN BANNER** was an outgrowth of **Zelenetz's** characteristic painstaking research for the **Warriors Three** story. "I'd come across an actual historical Norse legend; something called The Magic Raven Banner of Orkney belonged to an old Norse King. What the banner did was guarantee victory for the side that carried it, but the standard bearer himself was doomed to die in that battle . . . **Charlie** and I just adapted that legend to Asgard. What made it interesting was the fact that as a legend for mortals, it worked very well, in terms of dying in battle and what have you. In terms of transcending it into the godly realm, we had to work within the structure of how do gods die? How do the Asgardians die within the Marvel frame of reference? Within the Norse frame of reference, fortunately, gods die. That worked well; you know they'll die at Ragnarok, but what we took as our rationale, was, so long as the enemy forces are within the realm of faerie, so to speak, then death is a possibility. A giant can kill a god. Basically that's what we used as our frame of reference in taking it from mortals who die in battle to a god who dies in battle."

With such weighty technical questions disposed of, **Zelenetz** and **Vess** went about peopling their story with characters. First they needed a hero, or heroes, as **Alan Zelenetz** explained: "Originally we were going to have two brothers who were involved, and the search for the banner. One of them was lackadaisical and irresponsible, one of them was responsible, and then we'd play off that. Then we decided that it would be more dramatic to meld those characters into one, and having a character who originally is fearful, cowardly, indifferent, self-righteous, and over the course of the novel, learns to be the opposite of all those things . . . we created a character that could serve the function of living and dying in the course of the narrative, unlike if we had used **Thor** or **Balder** as the main character. So, we created **Greyval**, our own god, who bears The Raven Banner, who fears to bear it, then ultimately carries it and goes through a kind of *Red Badge of Courage* ordeal. It's kind of a mixture of the *Aeneid* and the *Red Badge of Courage* in terms of bearing the past on your shoulders, and also, *The Odyssey*, the travels through Asgard."

One of the reasons **Greyval** goes on the quest for The Raven Banner is because of his marriage to the beautiful Valkyrie, **Signis**. "They marry the day after his father is killed in battle, as tradition. It's to honor his death with life . . . " and while **Zelenetz** admits this is not an authenticated Norse custom, he explains: "It's something that we kind of put together, but it's in the Norse spirit, in other words, his father bids him not to mourn because there's nothing greater than to die in battle . . . The only thing that puts a crimp into his father's death is that his son, who was supposed to have retrieved the banner, has not. The flow of events seduces him from fulfilling that obligation. Nonetheless, he doesn't do it maliciously because he's under the impression that somebody else in Asgard will re-



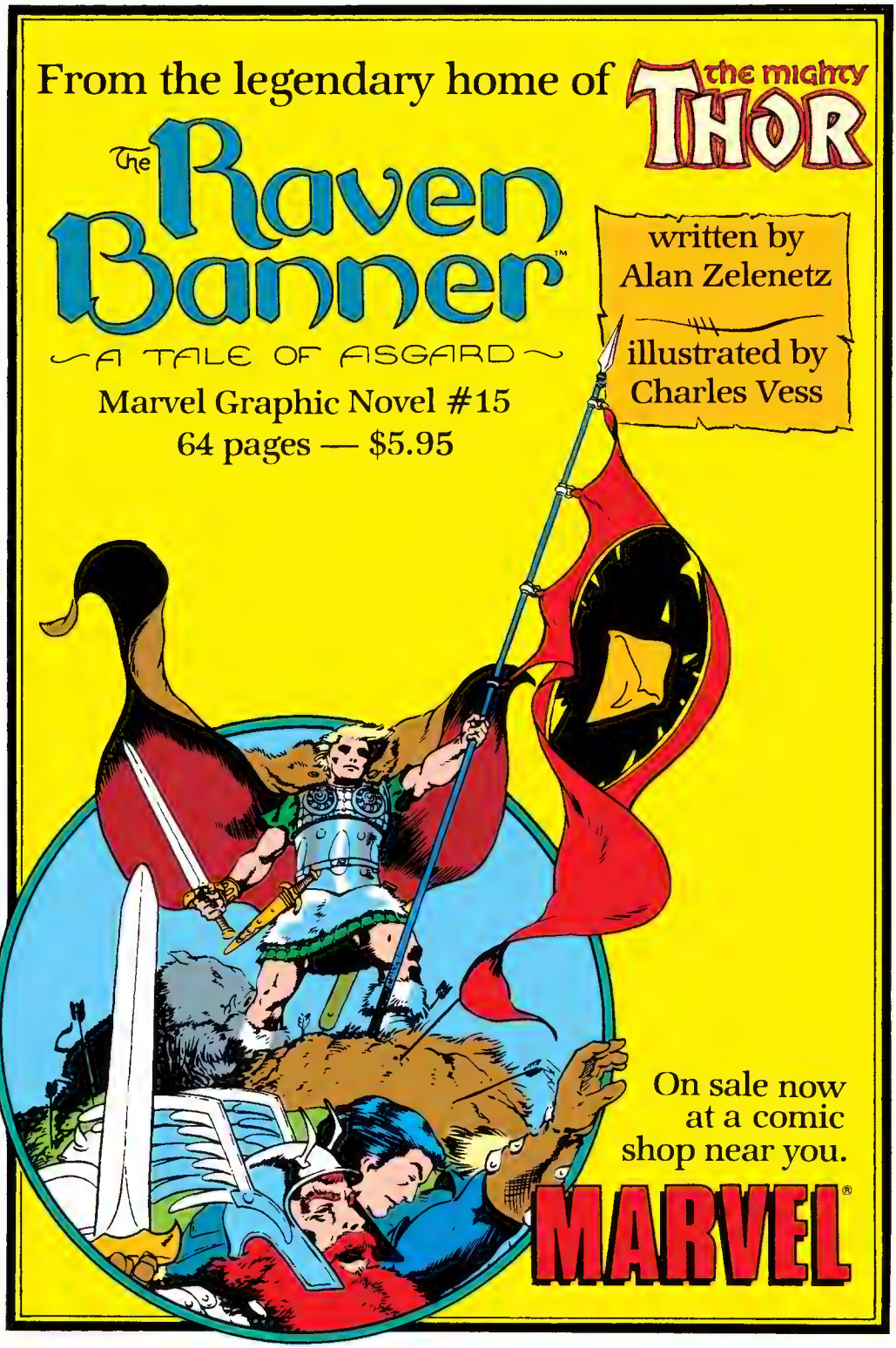
trieve the banner and . . . basically he'll be home free to live eternally with his new bride. The wrinkle in all of this is that (A) His bride has only wed him because of his traditional valor, which is not to imply that it's a loveless marriage, but that's what enamored her of **Greyval**, and (B) It's the trolls who've actually stolen the banner, and **Greyval** is mortified to discover that it wasn't retrieved by an Asgardian . . . "



So, **Greyval** must set out after The Raven Banner with **Balder** as his companion and guide. After a harrowing journey to the Norse underworld, **Balder** exits, leaving **Greyval** in the company of **Oddbrand**, the humanoid otter. Why an otter? "The otter" notes **Zelenetz**, is: " . . . an obvious Norse animal. The otter plays a lot of roles in the Norse mythology . . . Originally, we had **Balder** as the guide for **Greyval**, and then we realized we wanted a comic relief character. Originally it was going to be a bear, I think. We just knew it was going to be an animal because animals in fairy tales play a kind of *doppelgänger* role," adding: "They guarantee to a degree that they serve to create sympathy for your main character, if your main character is kind to animals, even if they're on two legs. He also becomes a kind of **Sancho Panza** . . . becomes to **Greyval** what **Greyval** was to **Balder**, so that **Greyval's** heroism becomes more explicit by having the contrast. We kind of pictured **Oddbrand** as **Lou Costello** . . . He shivers and shakes and gets scared and hides in the shadows, and is always there, though, when needed."

But, even with such allies as **Balder**, **Oddbrand** and **Signis**, **Greyval** is up against some stiff odds in his quest. Barring his way to The Raven Banner will be a *lot* of trolls, a very unfriendly giant, and **Greyval's** treacherous cousin **Horskuld**, who seeks the Raven Banner for his own ends. And however **Greyval's** quest ends, The Raven Banner promises to be a unique and very special graphic novel. **Charles Vess** describes his artwork for the book as: "a cross between **Jack Kirby** and **Arthur Rackham** (the 19th Century illustrator)," partaking of, "the dynamics of **Kirby** and **Rackham's** lyricism." The care and deep committment of both **THE RAVEN BANNER**'s creators is nicely expressed by **Alan Zelenetz**'s admission: "The first nine months while **Charlie** was pencilling, I was trying to do the first sentence. It's just that we wanted to strike a balance at the very outset; we wanted to let the reader know that there was a fairy tale with epic overtones, at the same time it was well within the comics genre, and it was very important. I want that established at the beginning. I also wanted it established at the very outset that, like it or not, you have to trust the sincerity of the people involved in this endeavor."

Marvel Graphic Novel #15 house ad
featured in *The Mighty Thor* #358 (August 1985)

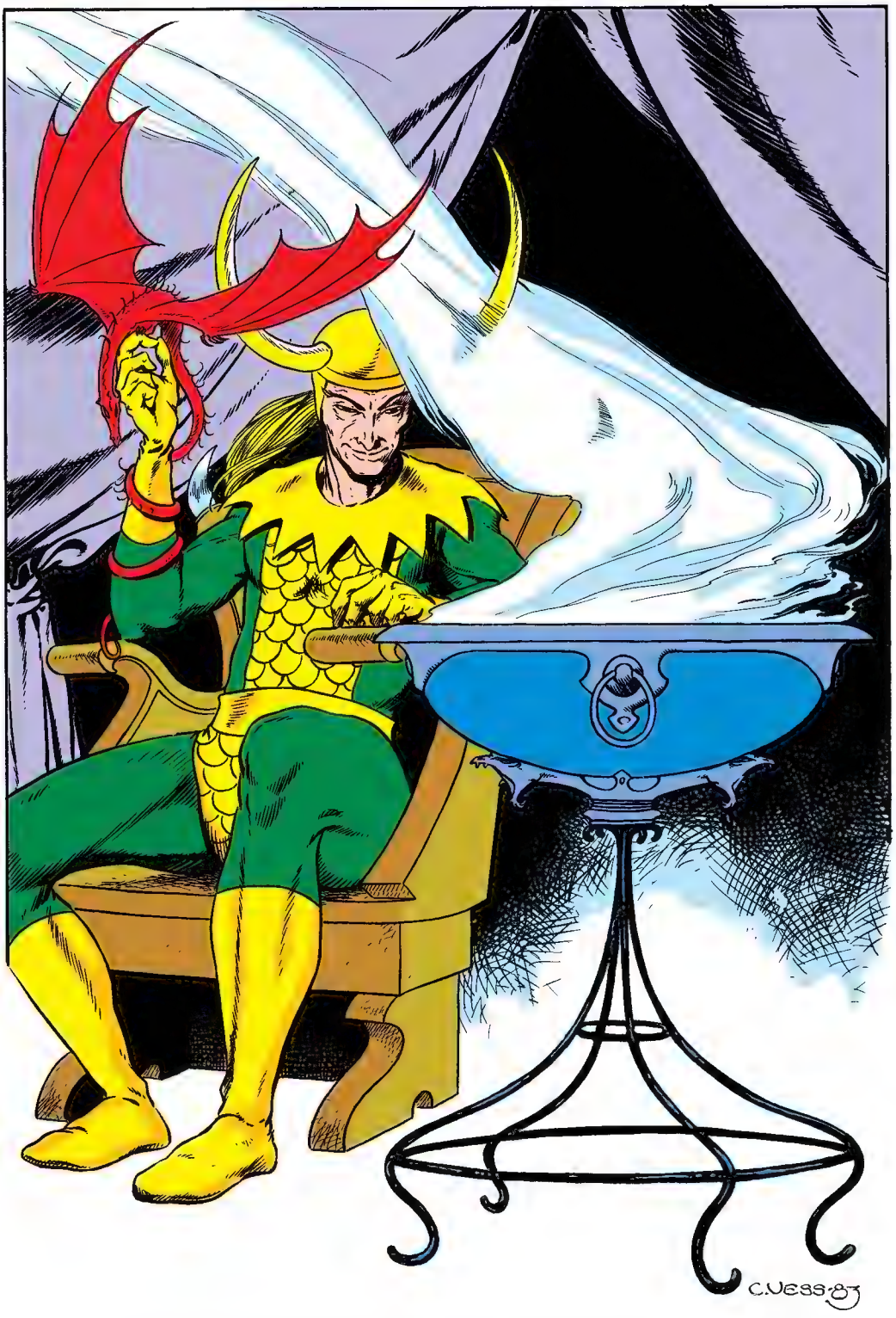


Marvel Fanfare #18 (January 1985) Thor (*plus* Ziggy Pig and Silly Seal) pinup
by Terry Austin

Marvel Fanfare #20 (May 1985) Heimdall pinup
by Charles Vess

VESS POCKET PORTFOLIO

Marvel Fanfare #20 (May 1985) Loki pinup
by Charles Vess



Marvel Fanfare #20 (May 1985) Odin pinup
by Charles Vess

Marvel Fanfare #20 (May 1985) Thor pinup
by Charles Vess

Marvel Fanfare #20 (May 1985) Hela pinup
by Charles Vess

Marvel Fanfare #22 (September 1985) Thor pinup
by Ken Steacy

The Mighty Thor #359 cover original art with unaltered background
by Walter Simonson

Courtesy Walter Simonson

WALTER SIMONSON'S SECRET HISTORY OF THE GREAT SURTUR WAR: Back when I had first begun to read Marvel comics, I wrote my own Thor story, combining bits of Norse mythology, Marvel mythology and Simonson mythology into what I hoped would be an epic tale of adventure. It was originally envisioned as about twelve comic books. I knew I didn't have the stamina required to draw twelve comics. But eventually, I tried my hand at drawing the climax of the tale, which was something on the order of 40 pages long.

I completed 27 pages, my first really sustained effort at drawing continuity. The work was inked with Rapidographs. I didn't know about nib pens or brushes or whiteout back then. I was 22 years old, and in the end, I gave up drawing the story, not because I had tired of it, but because I had begun to realize that my inking was not up to snuff. I thought I would lay the story aside and return to it when my inking had improved.

The Mighty Thor #351 page 17

The Mighty Thor #351 page 20

Fourteen years later, Mark Gruenwald offered me the chance to write and draw *The Mighty Thor*. I dusted off my old ideas, gussied them up in some new clothes and makeup, and sent them back out into the world. With better inking. As a tip of the hat to the enthusiasm and drive of the young artist I had once been, I reused as many of my original layouts and panel compositions as I could when I got to the climax of my story.

Here, for the first time, are a few panels from my original attempt to draw the climax of the Great Surtur War.

New York
January 2011

The Mighty Thor #352 page 4

A PITY YOU DO NOT CARRY SLOH'S SWORD!
HAHAHAHAHAHAHAH!!
AND NOW THE ETERNAL FLAME IS WITHIN MY GRASP AFTER ALL THESE MILLENNIA!

The Mighty Thor #351 page 21

Thor Legends Vol. 2: Walter Simonson TPB (August 2003) cover
by Walter Simonson & Matt Milla

Reprinting *The Mighty Thor* #349-355 & #357-359

INTRODUCTION

BY RALPH MACCHIO

FROM THOR LEGENDS VOL. 2: WALTER SIMONSON TPB (2003)

First off, I'd love to take credit for the brilliant move of placing Walter Simonson on *The Mighty Thor*. But I can't. That honor goes to my late, great friend, editor Mark Gruenwald, whose sudden loss several years ago is still being felt in our industry. Still, midway through Walt's run on *Thor*, I was asked to take the editorial reins from Mark. Naturally, prior to that, I'd followed Walt's work here with great enthusiasm.

If there was ever a title someone was born to write and draw, for Simonson, it was *Thor*. Walt told me that Thor was his favorite Marvel character, bar none. And the magnificent "Surtur Saga" that concluded in issue #353 actually was conceived by Walter way back in high school! I can just see him daydreaming his Viking epics in geometry class as he sketched those first, fledgling panels that, decades later, became one of the finest *Thor* epics ever.

Thor is an intimidating assignment for even the most accomplished creator. This was one of the seminal Marvel comics of the '60s. Stan Lee and Jack Kirby were at the absolute peak of their powers when they collaborated on the Thunder God. In my opinion, Walter Simonson, more than any other talent in this field, has been able to build upon the cosmic Lee/Kirby concepts and make them his own. And on *Thor*, it didn't hurt that Simonson was extremely well-versed in Norse mythology. One of the real triumphs of Walt's run was the seamless melding of genuine Norse myths with the established *Thor* continuity. Done as only a master craftsman could do it.

In addition to his first-rate writing, Walt's rendering of Thor and company bears mentioning. Simonson is an original, graphically. His art style is unique. Significantly, every element from the balloon shape to sound-effects lettering is an integral part of the visual composition of each page. He was able to fully create the many mythological environs peopled by the Asgardians in a soaring style that combined stark simplicity with lush detail.

I think it's a sincere tribute that after some 40 years of *Thor's* continual publication, the Walt Simonson period is considered by many to be second only to the initial Lee/Kirby era.

A brief anecdote or two: Walt requested artist Sal Buscema to pinch-hit pencil and ink issue #355. Walt and I were so pleased with the results we asked Sal on later as regular penciler during the final third of Walt's run. Finally, I'll never forget being contacted by an agent of the Federal Reserve system after issue #358 appeared. Seems the Fed was curious as to how we came by that information on how to pull off a successful heist of the gold in New York's Federal Reserve Bank. Who alerted them to our little fable I'll never know.

What I do know is that you're in for a rare treat as you savor these Simonson-style Asgardian epics. This is what *Thor* was meant to be! This is what Asgard is all about! So whirl that magic hammer, Froggy, and prepare to journey to the farthest reaches of the greatest fantasy realm of all—the Marvel universe! Don't plan on coming back the same.

Ralph Macchio

May 2003

Thor Visionaries: Walter Simonson Vol. 2 TPB Second Edition (May 2009) cover
by Walter Simonson & Matt Milla

Reprinting *The Mighty Thor* #349-355 & #357-359

Thor by Walter Simonson Omnibus (April 2011) variant cover
by Walter Simonson & Steve Oliff

Reprinting *The Mighty Thor* #337-355, #357-369 & #371-382 and *Balder the Brave* #1-4

BIOGRAPHIES

WALTER SIMONSON

Walter Simonson mixed the power of Jack Kirby comics with an experimental European influence to produce a visual style that has made him one of his generation's foremost innovators.

After achieving acclaim for DC's "Manhunter" feature in *Detective Comics*, Simonson moved to Marvel's black-and-white magazine line where he illustrated an adaptation of Robert E. Howard's "The Hyborean Age" and penciled the first three issues of *Rampaging Hulk*. Next came a yearlong stint on *Thor* that would be far from his last encounter with the Asgardian hero. Simonson soon made a decisive shift to sci-fi. Adaptations of *Close Encounters of the Third Time* for Marvel and *Alien: The Illustrated Story* in *Heavy Metal* were followed by runs on *Battlestar Galactica*, which featured Simonson's first writing credits, and *Star Wars*. Simonson continued to develop his craft as a writer on Marvel's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* adaptation and *Marvel Graphic Novel* #6: *Star Slammers*, a concept revived from his art school days that he wrote, penciled and inked.

In 1982, Simonson teamed with writer Chris Claremont on the DC/Marvel crossover team-up of the X-Men and New Teen Titans. Shortly thereafter, he began his epochal run scripting and penciling *Thor*, the first issue of which introduced Beta Ray Bill and became one of the most highly acclaimed titles of the period. His collaboration with his wife, Louise, on *X-Factor* included the introduction of Archangel and Apocalypse. Later, the husband and wife team would write the *Havok & Wolverine: Meltdown* prestige miniseries.

In the early '90s, Simonson had a memorable run writing and drawing *Fantastic Four*. Other credits from this era included the *Iron Man: 2020* one-shot and *Avengers*. More recent work has included *Orion* at DC, *Elric: The Making of a Sorceror* with Michael Moorcock and *Avengers* and *Indestructible Hulk* for Marvel.

JOHN BUSCEMA

Though primarily known for his long tenure as one of Marvel Comics' most prolific pencilers, John Buscema began his celebrated career at the age of 21 with Timely Comics. After Timely closed its in-house Bullpen, Buscema pursued comics work for a time before he left comics altogether for advertising in 1958.

When he returned to comics, however, he did so with a vengeance. Stan Lee recruited him away from advertising and quickly ensconced him into the upper ranks of Marvel artists. Picking up where *Avengers* mainstay Don Heck left off, "Big John" began what would be one of the title's definitive artistic runs. The much-anticipated *Silver Surfer* series was launched with Buscema at the helm, and top-tier books like *Fantastic Four* and *Thor* were entrusted to his care after Jack Kirby left Marvel for DC Comics.

Buscema's bold, muscular artwork commanded the comic-book page with realistic figurework that represented the next evolutionary step in post-Kirby Marvel Comics style. The respect accorded him within Marvel as an artist's artist was of such renown that he literally wrote the book on drawing, composing *How To Draw Comics the Marvel Way* with Stan Lee, the classic "how to" book in comic-book illustration.

He worked from the '70s through the '90s on nearly every title in the Marvel stable, including his personal favorite, *Conan the Barbarian*, with Roy Thomas. He retired in 1996, but returned every now and then to the comics scene until he passed away after a battle with cancer in 2002, the same year he was inducted into the Eisner Hall of Fame.

SAL BUSCEMA

Without a doubt one of comics' most prolific artists, "Our Pal" Sal Buscema joined Marvel in 1968 shortly after his elder brother, John. Tackling inking duties on *Silver Surfer* and *Fantastic Four*, including the all-time classic *Silver Surfer* #4, Buscema quickly graduated to penciling. He was an anchor of the Marvel line in the 1970s with long runs on books like *Captain America*, *Marvel Team-Up* and *The Spectacular Spider-Man* and a 100-plus issue run on *The Incredible Hulk*. Buscema was also behind defining the tone on early issues of *The Defenders*, *Rom* and *The New Mutants*. His career as one of Marvel's most versatile artists lasted throughout the '70s and into the '90s. In 1988, he returned to *The Spectacular Spider-Man* and over the next ten years penciled every issue but two from #134 through #238 (and inked the vast majority as well!) Although he retired in the late '90s, Buscema has continued to lend his talents to projects from time to time, most notably the cult hit *Spider-Girl*.

BUTCH GUICE

Jackson "Butch" Guice was born in 1961 in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Guice was working at a small design company in North Carolina when some of his fanzine art got the attention of Marvel. After being recruited by editor Al Milgrom, Guice didn't let a broken arm from a roller skating accident keep him from drawing his first credited work at Marvel, an extended run on *Micronauts* with writer Bill Mantlo. He worked with Mantlo again on his next projects: a four-issue *X-Men and the Micronauts* miniseries, an *Avengers Annual* and the *Swords of the Swashbucklers* Epic Graphic Novel and ongoing series. After inking four issues of Paul Chadwick's *Dazzler*, Guice joined writer Louise Simonson on *X-Factor* where they co-created the villain Apocalypse. Guice became a regular on Marvel's mutant titles, also working with writer Chris Claremont on *The New Mutants* and a pair of *The Uncanny X-Men* issues. In 1987, he launched a new Flash series at DC, but soon was back at Marvel, drawing *Iron Man*, *Doctor Strange, Sorcerer Supreme* and inking Steve Ditko's pencils on *Speedball*. In the '90s, Guice was returned to DC to draw Superman in *Action Comics*, *Birds of Prey* and *Resurrection Man*, a series featuring a new character

co-created with Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning. In 2001, Guice joined writer Mark Waid at CrossGen on the critically-acclaimed *Ruse*. After CrossGen, Guice returned to DC for runs on *JLA: Classified* and *Aquaman: Sword of Atlantis*, but, in 2007, made Marvel his home for much of the next decade-plus joining Ed Brubaker on *Captain America* and *Winter Soldier*, Brian Michael Bendis on *Ultimate Origins*, Nick Spencer on *Secret Avengers* and *The Invaders* with Chip Zdarsky.

BOB HARRAS

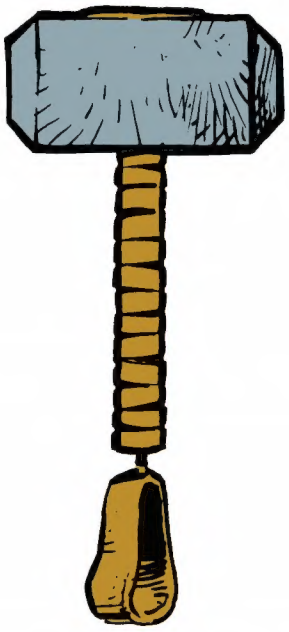
Bob Harras broke into comics in the early 1980s as an assistant editor to Ralph Macchio at Marvel. He eventually worked his way up to editor on titles like *G.I. Joe* and *The Incredible Hulk*, the latter of which saw him bringing Peter David and Todd McFarlane together for their epic run. Harras became X-Men editor in 1988, handling the red-hot franchise that boasted *The Uncanny X-Men*, *X-Factor*, *The New Mutants* and *Wolverine*. Concurrent with his editing work, Harras found time to write titles including *The Thing*, *Thor* and the 1984 and 1986 *Iron Man Annuals*. He raised his profile scripting the 1988 prestige-format series *Nick Fury vs. S.H.I.E.L.D.* and also launched a new *Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.* ongoing series the following year. In *Marvel Comics Presents,* he wrote a Cyclops serial, and, in 1991, Harras commenced a five-year run on *The Avengers*. During the early '90s, Harras also served as story consultant for the popular Fox TV *X-Men* animated series. After a brief time when he served as one in a group editor-in-chief arrangement, he became Marvel's sole editor in chief in 1995, serving through 2000. Leaving Marvel, he headed to DC to continue his career editing comics, first working with their WildStorm imprint, then as editor of DC's collected-editions office, and, by 2010, he was appointed DC's editor in chief, a role he occupied for a decade. After leaving DC in 2020, Harras took on a role as an editor-at-large with Immortal Studios.

CHARLES VESS

Widely regarded as one of the best fantasy illustrators of his generation, Charles Vess also built up quite a reputation as a comic book artist during his ascent in the 1980s. Born in 1951 and raised in pastoral Virginia, which he described as a wooded wonderland that was formative in imbuing his work with a sensual and magical quality, Vess' first work was for the sci-fi/fantasy magazine *Heavy Metal*. A few years later, he began a relationship with Marvel, contributing several fairy-tale stories in *Epic Illustrated*. Though fantasy art was Vess' strong suit—he penciled a "Tales of Asgard" story for *Marvel Fanfare*, illustrated an Asgard-based graphic novel *The Raven Banner* and penciled or inked various issues of *Kull the Conqueror* and *Conan the Barbarian*—he also dabbled in super hero comics, where his highly illustrative linework stood out on the racks. His now-iconic covers to *Web of Spider-Man* #1 and *Amazing Spider-Man* #261 were fan-favorites, and he scripted and illustrated a backup story, "Cry of the Wendigo," in *Amazing Spider-Man* #277. His high-profile work with Marvel culminated in the 1990 graphic novel *Spider-Man: Spirits of the Earth*, which he wrote and illustrated, and the 1991 movie adaptation of *Hook*. Vess was a natural fit with the burgeoning Vertigo imprint at DC, and paired with writer Neil Gaiman on *Sandman* and *Books of Magic*. Also with Gaiman, Vess illustrated the prose novel *Stardust* and the children's book *Blueberry Girl*. Outside of comics, Vess provided illustrations to George R. R. Martin's Game of Thrones novel *A Storm of Swords* and *The Books of Earthsea*, a collection of Ursula K. Le Guin's writings.

ALAN ZELENETZ

Alan Zelenetz enjoyed a prolific career writing at Marvel in the 1980s. He wrote issues of *Moon Knight*, *Avengers* and *Master of Kung Fu,* but most of his work was outside of super heroes in the sci-fi and fantasy genre. His tales of the son of Odin appeared *Bizarre Adventures*, a quartet of Annuals, a run of stories featuring the Warriors Three in *Marvel Fanfare* and an eight-issue run on *Thor*. He also wrote several stories in *The Savage Sword of Conan*, nearly the full run of the 1983 *Kull the Conqueror* series, multiple issues of *King Conan/Conan the King* and the 1989 graphic novel *Kull: The Vale of Shadow*. Zelenetz paired the Asgardian hero Thor with the Hyborian Age's Conan in an iconic team-up in *What If?* #39, "What If Thor of Asgard Had Met Conan the Barbarian?" He also helped spearhead the exhaustive *The Official Handbook of the Conan Universe*. In 1984, Zelenetz collaborated with writer Carl Potts and artist Frank Cirocco on *The Alien Legion*, a sci-fi series that was published under Marvel's Epic imprint. The writer wrote the entire twenty-issue run of the first series, as well as the 1987 graphic novel *The Alien Legion: A Grey Day to Die*. Zelenetz's last credit in comics was as author of the 1990 Epic graphic novel *Jhereg*. He left comics to become an educator and administrator, and in 2003 started the film production company Ovie Entertainment.



Biographies researched and written by John Rhett Thomas

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THE GOLDEN AGE

As the Great Depression wore on and the specter of war hung over America, a new storytelling medium was born: the comic book. Within comics' four-color pages, larger-than-life super heroes could make short work of America's foes, giving readers of all ages hope for victory against the real-life enemies that faced the United States. At the forefront of this new medium was Timely Comics.

GOLDEN AGE ALL-WINNERS VOLS. 1-4
GOLDEN AGE CAPTAIN AMERICA VOLS. 1-6
GOLDEN AGE DARING MYSTERY VOLS. 1-2
GOLDEN AGE HUMAN TORCH VOLS. 1-3
GOLDEN AGE MARVEL COMICS VOLS. 1-7
GOLDEN AGE MYSTIC COMICS VOL. 1
GOLDEN AGE SUB-MARINER VOLS. 1-3
GOLDEN AGE U.S.A. COMICS VOLS. 1-2
GOLDEN AGE YOUNG ALLIES VOLS. 1-2

THE ATLAS ERA

In the 1950s, Timely Comics evolved into Atlas and took on a vast new range of genres: science-fiction, outer-space adventure, romance, war, Western gunfighters, jungle heroines and, of course, horror and crime, which would become the center of a moral panic that rocked the industry. The Atlas Era had it all!

ATLAS ERA BATTLEFIELD VOL. 1
ATLAS ERA BLACK KNIGHT/YELLOW CLAW VOL. 1
ATLAS ERA HEROES VOLS. 1-3
ATLAS ERA JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA JUNGLE ADVENTURE VOLS. 1-3
ATLAS ERA MENACE VOL. 1
ATLAS ERA STRANGE TALES VOLS. 1-6
ATLAS ERA TALES TO ASTONISH VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA TALES OF SUSPENSE VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA VENUS VOL. 1

THE MARVEL AGE

In August 1961, change hit newsstands: *The Fantastic Four* #1 did not feature the squeaky-clean heroes. They were real characters placed in extraordinary circumstances. They lived together, they fought among themselves—and sometimes, they even lost to the bad guys. This was more than a change in attitude: It was the beginning of something entirely different—the beginning of the Marvel Age of Comics! Thanks to the fertile imaginations of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko and others, an unending list of heroes followed with ever-increasing acclaim and popularity: the Amazing Spider-Man, the Mighty Thor, the Incredible Hulk, Daredevil, Iron Man and the X-Men, to name but a few.

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN VOLS. 1-26
ANT-MAN/GIANT-MAN VOLS. 1-3
THE AVENGERS VOLS. 1-25
THE AVENGERS WEST COAST VOL. 1
THE BLACK PANTHER VOLS. 1-3
BROTHER VOODOO VOL. 1
CAPTAIN AMERICA VOLS. 1-17
CAPTAIN MARVEL VOLS. 1-6
THE CHAMPIONS VOL. 1
DAREDEVIL VOLS. 1-19
DAZZLER VOLS. 1-4
DEATHLOK VOL. 1
THE DEFENDERS VOLS. 1-9
DOCTOR STRANGE VOLS. 1-11
THE FANTASTIC FOUR VOLS. 1-27
GHOST RIDER VOLS. 1-7
HOWARD THE DUCK VOLS. 1-2
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THE INCREDIBLE HULK VOLS. 1-19
THE INHUMANS VOLS. 1-2
THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN VOLS. 1-18
IRON FIST VOLS. 1-2
KA-ZAR VOLS. 1-4
KILLRAVEN VOL. 1
LUKE CAGE VOLS. 1-3
THE MAN-THING VOLS. 1-2
MARVEL RARITIES VOL. 1
MARVEL TEAM-UP VOLS. 1-8
MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE VOLS. 1-8
THE MIGHTY THOR VOLS. 1-24
MS. MARVEL VOLS. 1-2
NICK FURY, AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D. VOLS. 1-3
NOT BRAND ECHH VOL. 1
OMEGA THE UNKNOWN VOL. 1
RAWHIDE KID VOLS. 1-2
THE SAVAGE SHE-HULK VOLS. 1-2
SGT. FURY VOLS. 1-4
THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN VOLS. 1-8
SPIDER-WOMAN VOLS. 1-4
THE SILVER SURFER VOLS. 1-2
THE SUB-MARINER VOLS. 1-8
THE TOMB OF DRACULA VOLS. 1-5
THE VISION AND THE SCARLET WITCH VOL. 1
WARLOCK VOLS. 1-2
WEREWOLF BY NIGHT VOLS. 1-3
THE X-MEN VOLS. 1-8
THE UNCANNY X-MEN VOLS. 1-17